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THE WORKS

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VOLUME I.

OLD KENSINGTON

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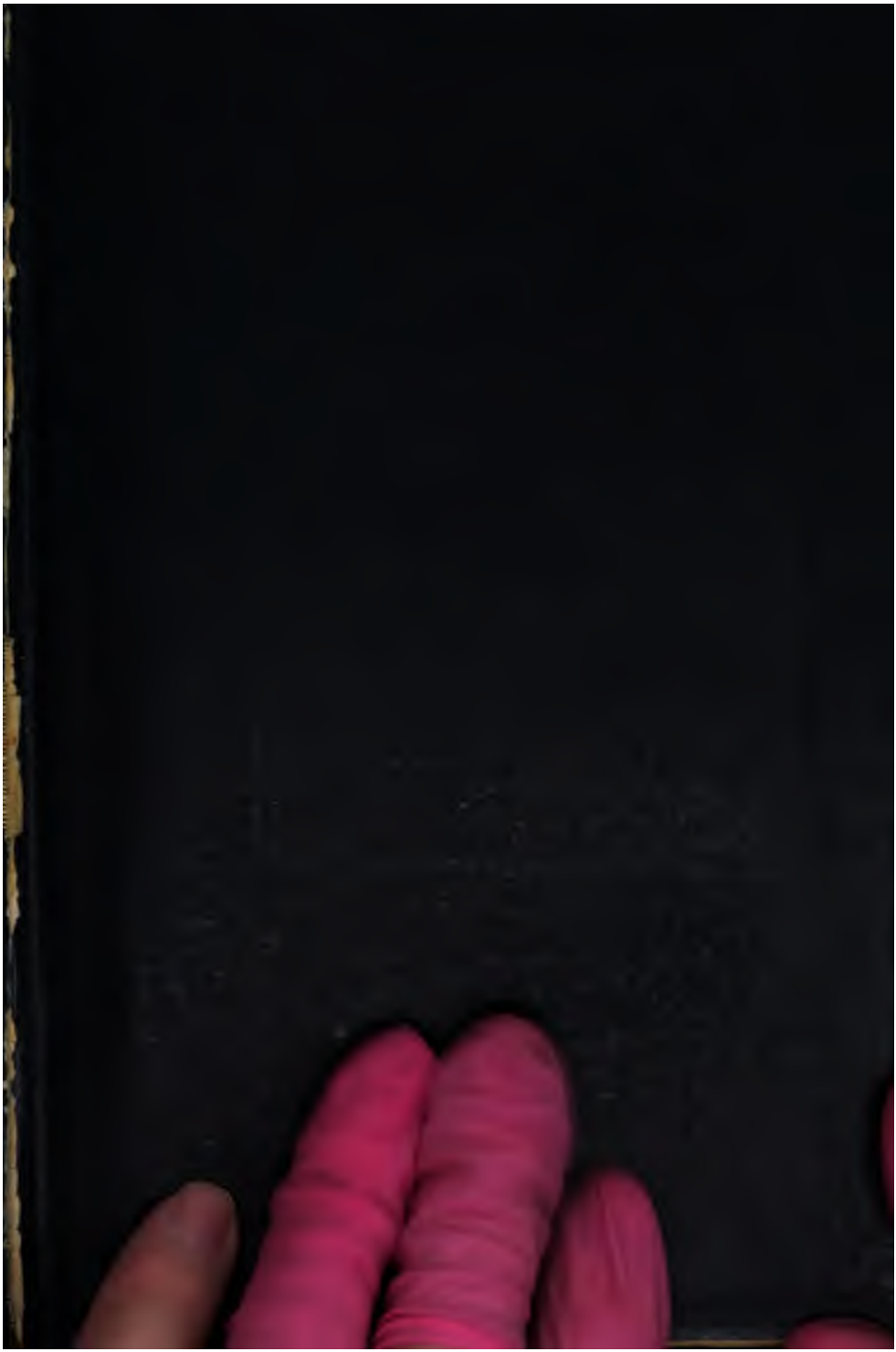

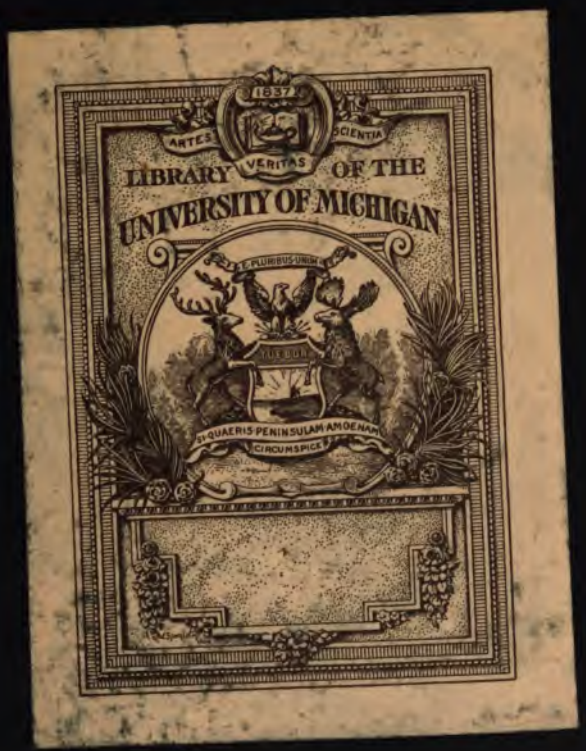
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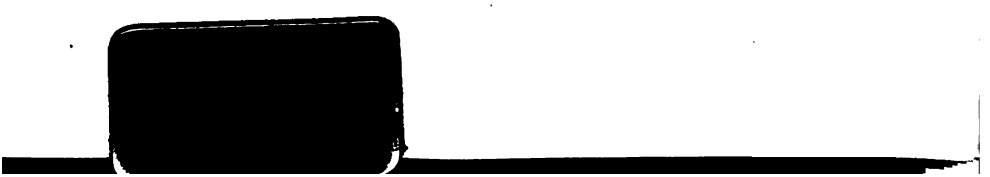

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OLD KENSINGTON

OLD KENSINGTON

T'is life whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh! life, not death, for which we pant.
More life and fuller that I want.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

OLD KENSINGTON,

BY

MISS THACKERAY.

LONDON.

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15, WATERLOO PLACE,

1875.

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A DEDICATION

TO SOME NEW FRIENDS.

SOMETIMES new friends meet one along the mid-way of life, and come forward with sweet unknown faces and with looks that seem strangely familiar to greet us.

To some of these new friends I must dedicate my story. It was begun ten years ago, and is older than my god-daughter Margie herself, who is the oldest among them. She is playing with her sister and her little cousins in the sunny Eton nurseries. Harry has a crown on. Annie is a queen who flies on errands. Ada and Lilly are Court ladies.

My neighbour Dolly and the little Dorotheas, however, have a first right to a presentation copy. It is true that the little ones cannot read, but they need not regret it; for Margie will take them on her knee and show them the pictures, and Georgie and Stella and Molly shall stand round too, and dark-eyed little Margaret can tell them her own sweet little stories, while Francis chimes in from the floor. Eleanor cannot talk, but she can sing; and so can our Laura at home, and her song is her own; a sweet home song; the song

of all children to those who love them. It tells of the past, and one day brings it back without a pang; it tells of a future, not remorselessly strange and chill and unknown, but bound to us by a thousand hopes and loving thoughts—a kingdom-come for us all, not of strangers, but of little children. And meanwhile Laura measures the present with her soft little fingers as she beats time upon her mother's hand to her own vague music.

8, SOUTHWELL GARDENS: *March* 20, 1873

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OLD KENSINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

BRICKS AND IVY.

> From the ivy where it dapples
> A grey ruin, stone by stone,
> Do you look for grapes and apples,
> Or for sad green leaves alone?
>
> —E. B. Browning.

A QUARTER of a century ago the shabby tide of progress had not spread to the quiet old suburb where Lady Sarah Francis's house was standing, with its many windows dazzling as the sun travelled across the old-fashioned housetops to set into a distant sea of tenements and echoing life. The roar did not reach the old house. The children could listen to the cawing of the rooks, to the echo of the hours, as they struck on from one day to another, vibrating from the old square tower of the church. At night the strokes seemed to ring more slowly than in the day. Little Dolly Vanborough, Lady Sarah's niece, thought each special hour had its voice. The church clock is silent now, but the rooks caw on undisturbed from one spring to another in the Old Kensington suburb. There are tranquil corners still, and sunny silent nooks, and ivy wreaths growing in the western

sun; and jessamines and vine-trees, planted by a former generation, spreading along the old garden-walls. But every year the shabby stream of progress rises and engulfs one relic or another, carrying off many and many a landmark and memory. Last year only, the old church was standing, in its iron cage, at the junction of the thoroughfares. It was the Church of England itself to Dolly and George Vanborough in those early church-going days of theirs. There was the old painting of the lion and the unicorn hanging from the gallery; the light streaming through the brown saints over the communion-table. In after-life the children may have seen other saints more glorious in crimson and in purple, nobler piles and arches, but none of them have ever seemed so near to heaven as the old Queen Anne building; and the wooden pew with its high stools, through which elbows of straw were protruding, where they used to kneel on either side of their aunt, watching with awe-stricken faces the tears as they came falling from the widow's sad eyes.

Lady Sarah could scarcely have told you the meaning of those tears as they fell—old love and life partings, sorrows and past mercies, all came returning to her with the familiar words of the prayers. The tears fell bright and awe-stricken as she thought of the present—of distances immeasurable—of life and its inconceivable mystery; and then her heart would warm with hope perhaps of what might be to come, of the overwhelming possibilities—how many of them to her lay in the warm clasp of the child's hand that came pushing into hers!—For her, as for the children, heaven's state was in the old wooden pew. Then the sing-song of the hymn would flood the old church with its homely cadence.

Prepare your glad voices;
Let Hisreal rejoice,

sang the little charity children; poor little Israelites, with blue stockings, and funny woollen knobs to their fustian

caps, rejoicing, though their pastures were not green as yet, nor was their land overflowing with milk and honey. However, they sang praises for others, as all people do at times, thanks be to the merciful dispensation that allows us to weep, to work, to be comforted, and to rejoice with one another's hearts, consciously or unconsciously, as long as life exists.

Every lane, and corner, and archway had a childish story for Dolly and her brother—for Dolly most especially, because girls cling more to the inanimate aspects of life than boys do. For Dolly the hawthorn bleeds as it is laid low and is transformed year after year into iron railings and areas, for particulars of which you are requested to apply to the railway company, and to Mr. Taylor, the house-agent. In those days the lanes spread to Fulham, white with blossom in spring, or golden with the yellow London sunsets that blazed beyond the cabbage-fields. In those days there were gardens, and trees, and great walls along the high-road that came from London, passing through the old white turnpike. There were high brown walls along Kensington Gardens, reaching to the Palace Gate; elms spread their shade, and birds chirrupped, and children played behind them.

Dolly Vanborough and her brother had had many a game there, and knew every corner and haunt of this sylvan world of children and ducks and nursemaids. They had knocked their noses against the old sun-dial many and many a time. Sometimes now, as she comes walking along the straight avenues, Dolly thinks she can hear the echo of their own childish voices whooping and calling to one another as they used to do. How often they had played with their big cousin, Robert Henley, and the little Morgans, round about the stately orange-house, and made believe to be statues in the niches!

'I am Apollo,' cries George Vanborough, throwing himself into an attitude.

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OLD KENSINGTON.

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THE WORKS

OF

MISS THACKERAY

time, out of which a whole home had passed away. Lady Sarah's troubles were over, leaving little behind; the silence of mid-life had succeeded to the loving turmoils and jealousies and anxieties of earlier days, only some memories remained of which the very tears and words seem wanting now and then, although other people may have thought that if words failed the widow, the silent deeds were there that should belong to all past affection.

One of the first things Dolly remembers is a landing-place one bitter east-winded morning, with the white blast blowing dry and fierce from the land, and swirling out to sea through the leafless forest of shipping; the squalid houses fast closed and double-locked upon their sleeping inmates: the sudden storms of dust and wind; the distant clanking of some awakening pail, and the bewildered ayah, in her rings and bangles, squatting on the ground and veiling her face in white muslin.

By the side of the ayah stands my heroine, a little puppy-like girl, staring as Indian children stare, at the strange dismal shores upon which they are cast; staring at the lady in the grey cloak, who had come on board with her papa's face, and caught her in her arms, and who is her Aunt Sarah; at the big boy of seven in the red mittens, whose photograph her papa had shown her in the verandah, and who is her brother George; at the luggage as it comes bumping and stumbling off the big ship; at the passengers departing. The stout little gentleman, who used to take her to see the chickens, pats Dolly on the head, and says he shall come and see her; the friendly sailor who carried her on shore shakes hands, and then the clouds close in, and the sounds and the faces disappear. . . .

Presently, into Dolly's gallery come pleasanter visions of the old house at Kensington, to which Lady Sarah took her straight away, with its brick wall, and ivy creepers,

OLD KENSINGTON

remained behind, frisking along the passages and up and down the landing-places of Church House. She was much nicer, Rhoda thought, than her own real cousins the Morgans in Old Street.

As days go by, Dolly's pictures warm and brighten from early spring into summer-time. By degrees they reach above the table and over and beyond the garden roller. They are chiefly of the old garden, whose brick walls seem to enclose sunshine and gaudy flowers all the summer through; of the great Kensington parks, where in due season chestnuts are to be found shining among the leaves and dry grasses; of the pond, where the ducks are flapping and diving; of the house, which was little Rhoda's home. This was the great bare house in Old Street, with plenty of noise, dried herbs, content, children without end, and thick bread-and-butter. There was also cold stalled ox on Sundays at one.

In those days life was a simple matter to the children; their days and their legs lengthened together; they loved, they learned, and they looked for a time that was never to be—when their father and mother should come home and live with them again, and everybody was to be happy. As yet the children thought they were only expecting happiness.

George went to school at Frant, near Tunbridge Wells, and came home for the holidays. Dolly had a governess too, and she used to do her lessons with little Rhoda in the slanting schoolroom at the top of Church House. The little girls did a great many sums, and learnt some French, and read little Arthur's *History of England* to everybody's satisfaction.

Kind Lady Sarah wrote careful records of the children's progress to her brother, who had sent them to the faithful old sister at home. He heard of the two growing up with good care and much love in the sunshine that streamed upon the old garden; playing together on the terrace that he

remembered so well; pulling up the crocuses and the violets that grew in the shade of the white holly-tree. George was a quaint, clever boy, Sarah wrote; Dolly was not so quick, but happy and obedient, and growing up like a little spring flower among the silent old bricks.

Lady Sarah also kept up a desultory correspondence with Philippa, her sister-in-law. Mrs. Vanborough sent many minute directions about the children; Dolly was to dine off cold meat for her complexion's sake, and she wished her to have her hair crimped; and George was to wear kid-gloves and write a better hand; and she hoped they were very good, and that they sometimes saw their cousin Robert, and wrote to their uncle, Sir Thomas Henley, Henley Court, Smokethwaite, Yorkshire: and she and dear papa often and often longed for their darlings. Then came presents—a spangled dress for Lady Sarah, and silver ornaments for Dolly, and an Indian sword for George, with which he nearly cut off Rhoda's head.

CHAPTER III.

TO OLD STREET BY THE LANES.

And after April when May follows,
And the white-throat builds, and all the swallows,
. . And buttercups the little children's dower.

—R. Browning.

In those days, as I have said, the hawthorn spread across the fields and market-gardens that lay between Kensington and the river. Lanes ran to Chelsea, to Fulham, to North End, where Richardson once lived and wrote in his garden-house. The mist of the great city hid the horizon and dulled the sound of the advancing multitudes; but close at hand, all round about the old house, were country corners untouched—blossoms instead of bricks in spring-time, summer shade in summer. There were strawberry-beds, green, white, and crimson in turn. The children used to get many a handful of strawberries from Mr. Penfold, the market-gardener at the end of the lane, and bunches of radish when strawberries were scarce. They gathered them for themselves on a bank where paving-stones and coal-holes are now and a fine growth of respectable modern villas. I believe that in those days there were sheep grazing in Kensington Gore. It is certain that Mr. Penfold kept Alderneys in the field beyond his orchard; and that they used to come and drink in a pond near his cottage. He lived with his wife and his daughter, under an old tiled roof, and with a rose-tree growing on the wall. In the window of the

cottage a little card was put up, announcing that "Curds-and-whey were to be had within," and the children sometimes went there to drink the compound out of Emma Penfold's doll's tea-things. The old pond was at the garden-gate: there was a hedge round about it, and alder-trees starting up against the sunset, and the lanes, and orchards beyond. The water reflected the sunset in the sky and the birds flying home to the sound of the evening bells. Sometimes Emma would come out of the cottage, and stand watching the children play. She was a pretty girl, with rosy cheeks and dark soft eyes. It was a quaint old corner, lonely enough in the daytime; but of evenings, people would be passing—labourers from their work, strollers in the fields, neighbours enjoying the air. The cottage must have been as old as Church House itself. It was chiefly remarkable for its beautiful damask rose-trees, of which the red leaves sprinkled the threshold, across which pretty Emma Penfold would step. I think it was for the sake of the rose-tree that people sometimes stopped and asked for curds-and-whey. Emma would dispense the horrible mixture, blushing beneath her basket-work plaits.

Sometimes in May mornings the children would gather hawthorn branches out of the lanes, and make what they liked to call garlands for themselves. The white blossoms looked pretty in Rhoda's dark hair; and Mademoiselle, coming to give them their music-lesson, would find the little girls crowned with May-flower wreaths. It was hard work settling down to lessons on those days. How slowly the clocks ticked when the practice hour began; how the little birds would come hopping on the window-ledge, before Dolly had half finished her sum; how cruel it was of Mademoiselle to pull down the blind and frighten the poor little birds away. Many pictures in Dolly's gallery belong to this bit of

her life. It seems one long day as she looks back to it, for when the sun set Dolly too used to be put to bed.

As for little Rhoda she would be sent back to Old Street. When prayers were over, long after Dolly was asleep, she would creep upstairs alone to the very top of the house, and put herself to bed and blow out her own candle if Zoe did not come for it. How bare and chill and lonely it was to be all by oneself at the top of that busy house! 'I don't think they would come, even if I screamed,' Rhoda would think as she lay staring at the cupboard-door, and wondering if there was any one behind it.

Once the door burst open and a great cat jumped out, and Rhoda's shriek brought up one of John Morgan's pupils, who had been reading in his room.

'Is anything the matter?' said the young man at the door.

'Oh, no, no—o! Please don't say I screamed?' said little Rhoda, disappearing under the bed-clothes.

'Silly child!' (This was Aunt Morgan's voice in the passage.) 'Thank you, Mr. Raban, I will go to her. A little girl of ten years old frightened at a cat! For shame, Rhoda! There—go to sleep directly,' and her Aunt Morgan vigorously tucked her up and gave her a kiss.

The Morgans were a cheerful and noisy household; little Rhoda lived there, but she scarcely seemed to belong to it: she was like a little stray waif born into some strange nest full of active, early, chirping birds, all bigger and stronger than herself. The Rev. John Morgan was master of the nest, which his step-mother kept in excellent order and ruled with an active rod. There were two pupils, two younger brothers, two sisters, and Rhoda Parnell, the forlorn little niece they had adopted. Downstairs the fat parlour-maid and the old country cook were established, and a succeeding generation of little charity-boys, who were expected by Mrs. Morgan to

work in the garden, go errands, and learn their catechisms, while blacking the young gentlemen's boots in a vault-like chamber set apart for that purpose.

Mrs. Morgan was a thrifty woman, and could not bear to think of time or space being wasted, much less comestibles. Her life had been one long course of early rising, moral and physical rectitude. She allowed John to sit in an arm-chair, but no one else if she could help it. When poor little Rhoda was tired, she used to go up to the room she shared with Zoe, her youngest cousin, and lie down on the floor. If Zoe told her mother, a message would come immediately for Rhoda to help with the poor flannel.

This poor flannel was Mrs. Morgan's own kingdom. She used to preside over passive rolls of grey and blue. She could cut out any known garment in use in any civilized community. She knew the right side of the stuff, the right way to turn the scissors. She could contrive, direct, turn corners, snip, snap on occasions, talking the whole time; she was emphatic always. In her moments of relaxation she dearly loved a whisper. She wore a front of curls with a velvet band and Kensington-made gowns and shoes. Cassie and Zoe, when they grew up to be young ladies, used to struggle hard for Knightsbridge fashions. The Kensington style was prim in those days. The ladies wore a dress somewhat peculiar to themselves and cut to one pattern by the Misses Trix in their corner house. There was a Kensington world (I am writing of twenty years ago) somewhat apart from the big uneasy world surging beyond the turnpike—a world of neighbours bound together by the old winding streets and narrow corners in a community of venerable elm-trees and traditions that are almost levelled away. Mr. Awl, the bootmaker, in High Street, exhibited peculiar walking-shoes long after high-heels and kid brodekins had come into fashion in the metropolis. The last time

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I was in his shop I saw a pair of the old-fashioned, flat, sandalled shoes, directed to Miss Vieuxtemps, in Palace Green. Tippets, poke-bonnets, even a sedan-chair, still existed among us long after they had been discarded by more active minds. In Dolly's early days, in Kensington Square itself, high-heels and hoops were not unknown; but these belonged to ladies of some pretension, who would come in state along the narrow street leading from the Square, advancing in powder, and hoops, and high-heeled shoes—real hoops, real heels, not modern imitations, but relics unchanged since the youth of the ghost-like old sisters. They lived in a tall house, with a mansard roof. As the children passed they used to look up at the cobweb-windows, at the narrow doorway with its oaken daïs, and the flagged court and the worn steps. Lady Sarah told Dolly that Mrs. Francis had known Talleyrand, when he was living there in one of the old houses of the Square. At any time it would be easy to conjure up ghosts of great people with such incantations of crumbling wall and oaken device and panel. Not Talleyrand only, but a whole past generation, still lives for us among these quaint old ruins.

The Kensington tradespeople used to be Conservative, as was natural, with a sentry in the High Street, and such a ménagerie of lions and unicorns as that which they kept over their shop-fronts. They always conversed with their customers while they measured a yard of silk or sold a skein of thread across their counters. Dolly would feel flattered when Mr. Baize found her grown. Even Lady Sarah would graciously reply to his respectful inquiries after her health on the rare occasions when she shopped herself. Mrs. Morgan never trusted anybody with her shopping.

'*I* always talk to Baize,' she would say, complacently, coming away after half-an-hour's exchange of ideas with that respectable man. She would repeat his conversation for the

benefit of her son and his pupils at tea-time. 'I think tradespeople are often very sensible and well-informed persons,' said Mrs. Morgan, 'when they do not forget themselves, Mr. Raban. Radical as you are, you must allow that Kensington tradespeople are always respectful to the clergy—our position is too well established; they know what is due to us,' said Mrs. Morgan gravely.

'They don't forget what is due to themselves,' said Mr. Raban, with an odd sort of smile.

'That they don't,' said Robert Henley, who was Morgan's other pupil at that time. 'I daresay Master George wishes they would; he owes a terrible long bill at Baize's for ties and kid-gloves.'

Presently came a ring at the bell. 'Here he is,' cries John, starting up hastily. 'No more tea, thank you, mother.'

George Vanborough used also to read with John Morgan during the holidays. The curate's energy was unfailing; he slaved, taught, panted, and struggled for the family he had shouldered. What a good fellow he was! Pack clouds away, no shades or evil things should come near him as he worked; who ever piped to him that he did not leap, or call to him that he did not shout in answer. With what emphasis he preached his dull Sunday sermon, with what excitement he would to his admiring sisters and mother read out his impossible articles in the *Vestryman's Magazine* or elsewhere, how liberally he dashed and italicised his sentences, how gallantly he would fly to his pen or his pulpit in defence of friend or in attack of foe (the former being flesh and blood, and the latter chiefly spiritual). And then he was in love with a widow—how he admired her blue and pink eyes; he could not think of marrying until the boys were out in the world and the girls provided for. But with Joe's wit and Tom's extraordinary powers, and the girls'

remarkable amiability, all this would surely be settled in the course of a very short time.

The Morgan family was certainly a most united and affectionate clan. I don't know that they loved each other more than many people do, but they certainly believed in each other more fervently. They had a strange and special fascination for George, who was not too young to appreciate the curate's unselfishness.

The younger Morgans, who were a hearty, jolly race, used to laugh at George. Poor boy, he had already begun to knock his head, young as it was, against stone walls; his schoolfellows said he had cracked it with his paradoxes. At twelve he was a stout fellow for his age, looking older than he really was. He was slow and clumsy, he had a sallow complexion, winking blue eyes, a turn-up nose, and heavy dark eyebrows; there was something honest and almost pathetic at times in the glance of these blue eyes, but he usually kept them down from shyness as well as from vanity, he didn't dare look in people's faces, he thought he should see them laughing at him. He was very lazy, as sensitive people often are; he hated games and active amusements; he had a soft melancholy voice that was his one endowment, besides his gift for music; he could work when he chose, but he was beginning life in despair with it, and he was not popular among his companions; they called him conceited, and they were right; but it was a melancholy conceit, if they had but known it. The truth was, however, that he was too ugly, too clever, too clumsy to get on with boys of a simpler and wholesomer mind. Even John Morgan, his friend and preceptor, used to be puzzled about him and distressed at times. 'If George Vanborough were only more like his own brothers, there would be something to be done with him,' thought honest John as those young gentlemen's bullet-heads passed the window where the pupil and his preceptor were at

work. If only—there would be a strange monotony in human nature, I fancy, if all the 'if onlys' could be realised, and we had the moulding of one another, and pastors and masters could turn assenting pupils out by the gross like the little chalk rabbits Italian boys carry about for sale.

Dolly was very well contented with her brother just as he was. She trusted his affection, respected his cleverness, and instinctively guessed at his vanities and morbidities. Even when she was quite a child, Dolly, in her sweet downright way, seemed to have the gift of healing the wounds of her poor St. Sebastian, who, when he was a little boy, would come home day after day smarting and bleeding with the arrows of his tormentors. These used to be, alternately, Lady Sarah herself, Cassie Morgan, and Zoe, the two boys when they were at home for the holidays, and little Rhoda, whom he declared to be the most malicious of them all. The person who treated George with most sympathy and confidence was Mrs. Morgan, that active and garrulous old lady, to whom anybody was dear who would listen to the praises of her children.

Robert Henley, as I have said, was also studying with John Morgan. He had just left Eton. Lady Sarah asked him to Church House at her sister-in-law's request; but he did not often find time to come and see them. He used to be tramping off to Putney, where he and his friend Frank Raban kept a boat; or they would be locked up together with ink and blots and paper in John Morgan's study. Raban was older than Henley. He was at College, but he had come up for a time to read for his degree.

Old Betty, the cook at John Morgan's, was a Yorkshire woman, and she took a motherly interest in the pupils. She had much to say about young Mr. Raban, whose relations she knew in Yorkshire. Betty used to call Frank Raban 'a noist young man.'

'He's Squoire's hair and grandsun loike,' she told Rhoda and Dolly one day. 'They cannot do n' less nor roast a hox when 'a cooms t' hage.'

After this Rhoda used to stand on tiptoe and respectfully peep through the study window at the heads and the books and the tobacco-smoke within; but there was a big table in the way, and she could never see much more than her own nose reflected in the glass. Once or twice, when George was in the way, as a great favour he would be allowed to accompany the young men in one of their long expeditions in big boots. They would come home late in the evening, tired and hungry and calling out for food. At whatever hour they came old Betty had a meal of cold meat and cake for them, of which George partook with good appetite. At Church House, if George was late for dinner he had to wait for tea and thin bread-and-butter at eight o'clock. Lady Sarah, who had fought many a battle for George's father, now—from some curious retrospective feeling—seemed to feel it her duty to revive many of her late husband's peculiarities, and one of them was that nothing was to be allowed to interfere with the routine of the house. Routine there was none at the curate's, although there were more hours, perhaps, than in any other house in Old Street. The sun rose and set, the seasons drifted through the back garden in changing tints and lights, each day brought its burden, and the dinner-time was shifted to it.

CHAPTER IV.

AN AFTERNOON AT PENFOLD'S.

Whilst yet the calm hours creep,
  Whilst flowers are gay,
Whilst eyes that change ere night
  Make glad the day,
Whilst yet the calm hours creep,
Dream thou, and from thy sleep
Then wake to weep.

To this day Dolly remembers the light of a certain afternoon in May when all was hot and silent and sleepy in the school-room at Church House. The boards cracked, the dust-moats floated; down below, the garden burnt with that first summer glow of heat that makes a new world out of such old, well-worn materials as twigs, clouds, birds, and the human beings all round us. The little girls had been at work, and practised, and multiplied, and divided again; they had recollected various facts connected with the reign of Richard the Second. Mademoiselle had suppressed many a yawn, Dolly was droning over her sum—six and five made thirteen—over and over again. 'That I should have been, that thou shouldst have been, that he shouldst have been,' drawled poor little Rhoda. Then a great fly hums by, as the door opens, and Lady Sarah appears with a zigzag of sunlight shooting in from the passage—a ray of hope. Lady Sarah has her bonnet on, and a sort of put-away-your-lesscns-children face.

Is there any happiness like that escape on a summer's day from the dull struggle with vacuity, brown paper-covered books, dates, ink-blots, cramps, and crotchets, into the open air of birds, sounds, flowers, liberty everywhere? As the children come out into the garden with Lady Sarah, two butterflies are flitting along the terrace. The Spanish jessamine has flowered in the night, and spreads its branches out fragrant with its golden drops. Lady Sarah gathers a sprig and opens her parasol. She is carrying a book and a shawl, and is actually smiling. The pigeons go whirring up and down from their pigeon-cote high up in the air. Four o'clock comes sounding across the ivy-wall, the notes strike mellow and distinct above the hum of human insects out and about. Half Lady Sarah's district is sunning itself on the door-steps, children are squatting in the middle of the road. The benches are full in Kensington Gardens, so are the steamers on the river. To these people walking in their garden there comes the creaking sound of a large wheel-barrow, and at the turn of the path they discover Mr. Penfold superintending a boy and a load of gravel. Mr. Penfold is a cheerful little man, with gloomy views of human nature. According to Penfold's account there were those (whoever they might be) who was always a plotting against you. They was hup to everything, and there was no saying what they was not at the bottom of. But Penfold could be heven with them, and he kep' hisself to hisself, and named no names. Dolly felt grateful to these unknown beings when she heard Mr. Penfold telling Lady Sarah they had said as how that Miss Dorothea 'ad been makin' hinquiry respectin' of some puppies. He did not know as how she wished it generally know'd, but he might mention as he 'ad two nice pups down at his place, and Miss Dorothea was welcome to take her choice.

It is a dream Dolly can scarcely trust herself to con-

template. Lady Sarah does not say no, but she looks at her watch, telling Dolly to run back to the house, and see if the post is come in, and continues graciously, 'I am much obliged to you, Penfold; I have no doubt Miss Dorothea will be glad to have one of your puppies. What is your daughter doing? Is she at home?'

'Yes, my lady,' says Penfold, mysteriously pointing over his shoulder with his thumb. 'They would have 'ad us send the gurl away, but she is a good gurl, though she takes her own way, and there are those as puts her hup to it.'

'We all like our own way, without anybody's suggestions,' said Lady Sarah, smiling. Then Dolly comes flying from the house, and tumbles over a broom-stick, so that she has to stop to pick up her handful of letters.

'Thank you, my dear: now if you like we will go and see the puppies,' says Aunt Sarah. 'No Indian letter' (in a disappointed voice). 'I wish your mother would——. Run on, Dolly.'

So Dolly runs on with Rhoda, thinking of puppies, and Lady Sarah follows thinking of her Indian letter, which is lying under the laurel-tree where Dolly dropped it, and where Penfold presently spies it out and picks it up, unconscious of its contents. After examining the seal and some serious thought, he determines to follow the trio. They have been advancing in the shadow of the hedges, through the gaps of which they can see people at work in the sunshiny cabbage-fields. Then they come to Earl's Court, and its quaint old row of houses, with their lattices stuffed with spring-flowers, and so to the pond by the road-side (how cool and deep it looked as they passed by), and then by the wicket-gate they wander into Penfold's orchard, of which some of the trees are still in flower, and where Lady Sarah is soon established on the stump of a tree. Her magazine pages flutter as the warm, sweet winds come blowing from

across the fields—the shadows travel on so quietly that you cannot tell when they go or whither. There is no sound but a little calf bleating somewhere. Rhoda is picking daisies in the shade, Dolly is chirping to herself by the hedge that separates the orchard from the Penfolds' garden. There is a ditch along one part of the hedge, with a tangle of grass and dock-leaves and mallows; a bird flies out of the hedge, close by Dolly's nose, and goes thrilling and chirping up into the sky, where the stars are at night; the daisies and buttercups look so big, the grass is so long and so green; there are two purple flowers with long stalks close at hand, but Dolly does not pick them; her little heart seems to shake like the bird's song, it is all so pretty; the dandelions are like lamps burning. She tries to think she is a bird, and that she lives in the beautiful hedges.

From behind the hawthorn hedge some voices come that Dolly should certainly know. . . .

'You'll believe me another time,' cries some one, with a sort of sniff, and speaking in tones so familiar that Dolly, without an instant's hesitation, sets off running to the wicket-gate, which had been left open, and through which she now sees, as she expects, George with his curly head and his cricketing cap standing in the Penfolds' garden, and with him her cousin Robert, looking very tall as he leans against a paling, and talks to Mrs. Penfold. There is also another person whom Dolly recognises as Mr. Raban, and she thinks of the 'hox,' as she gazes with respect at the pale young man with his watch-chain and horseshoe pin. He has a straw hat and white shoes and a big knobstick in his hand, and nodding to Robert, he strides off towards the cottage. Dolly watches him as he walks in under the porch: no doubt he is going to drink curds and whey, she thinks.

'Why, Dolly! are *you* here?' says Robert, coming towards her.

'Missy is often here,' says Mrs. Penfold, looking not over-pleased. 'Is Mrs. Marker with you, my dear?'

Dolly would have answered, but from the farther end of the garden behind Mrs. Penfold, two horrible apparitions advance, rusty black, with many red bobs and tassels dangling, and deliberate steps and horrible crinkly eyes. Old Betty would call them Bubbly Jocks; Dolly has no name for them, but shrinks away behind her big cousin.

'Here are Dolly's bogies,' says George, who is giving himself airs on the strength of his companionship and his short cut. 'Now then, Dolly, they are going to bite like ghosts.'

'Don't,' cried Dolly.

'Are you afraid of turkeys, Dolly! Little girls of eight years old shouldn't be afraid of anything,' said Rhoda, busy with her flowers. Alas! Rhoda's philosophy is not always justified by subsequent experience. It is second-hand, and quoted from Mrs. Morgan.

'We are going to see the puppies,' says Dolly, recovering her courage as the turkey-cocks go by. 'Won't you come, Robert?'

'Puppies!' said Robert. 'Are you fond of puppies, Dolly? My Aunt Henley says she prefers them to her own children.'

'So should I,' says Dolly, opening her eyes.

Presently Robert and Dolly come back, with two little fuzzy heads wildly squeaking from Dolly's lap, and old Bunch, the mother of the twins, following, half-agonised, half-radiant. They set the little staggering bundles down upon the ground, and Dolly squats in admiration while Robert goes off upon his business, and Mrs. Penfold hurries back into the house as Mr. Penfold appears crossing the lane.

Mr. Penfold was gone: Dolly was still watching with all-absorbed eyes, when George started up. 'I say, Dolly! look there at Aunt Sarah.'

Aunt Sarah! What had come to her, and how strange she looked walking through the orchard with a curious rapid step, and coming towards the open wicket-gate, through which the children could see her. Her bonnet was falling off her face, her hair was pushed back, she came very quick, straight on, looking neither to the right nor to the left, with her fixed eyes and pale cheeks. Penfold seemed hurrying after her; he followed Lady Sarah into the garden, and then out again into the road. She hardly seemed to know which way she went.

What had happened? Why didn't she answer when Dolly called her? As she passed so swiftly, the children thought that something must have happened; they did not know what. George set off running after her; Dolly waited for a minute.

'Why did she look so funny?' said Rhoda, coming up.

'I don't know,' said Dolly, almost crying.

'She had a black-edged letter in her hand,' said Rhoda, 'that Mr. Penfold brought. When people think they are going to die they write and tell you on black paper.'

Then Mrs. Penfold came running out of the cottage with a shriek, and the children running too, saw the gardener catch Aunt Sarah in his arms, as she staggered and put out her hands. When they came up, she lay back in his arms scarce conscious, and he called to them to bring some water from the pond. No wonder Dolly remembered that day, and Aunt Sarah lying long and straight upon the grass by the road-side. The letter had fallen from her hand, they threw water upon her face; it wetted her muslin dress, and her pale cheeks; a workman crossing from the field, stood and looked on awhile; and so did the little children from the carpenter's shed up the road, gazing with

wondering eyes at the pale lady beginning to move again at last and to speak so languidly.

The labourer helped to carry her into the cottage as she revived. George had already run home for Marker. Dolly and Rhoda, who were shut out by Mrs. Penfold, wandered disconsolately about the garden and into the orchard again, where Aunt Sarah's parasol was lying under the tree, and her book thrown face downwards: presently the little girls came straggling back with it to the garden-house once more.

The parlour door was shut close when they reached it, the kitchen door was open. What was that shrill shivering cry? Who could it be? Perhaps it was some animal, thought Dolly.

In the kitchen some unheeded pot was cooking and boiling over; the afternoon sun was all hot upon the road outside, and Bunch and the puppies had lain down to sleep in a little heap on the step of the house.

Long, long after, Dolly remembered that day, everything as it happened: Marker's voice inside the room; young Mr. Raban passing by the end of the lane talking to Emma Penfold. (Mrs. Penfold had unlocked the back-door, and let them out.) After a time the shrill sobs ceased; then a clock struck, and the boiling pot in the kitchen fell over with a great crash, and Rhoda ran to see, and at that moment the parlour door opened, and Lady Sarah came out, very pale still and very strange, leaning, just as if she was old, upon Marker and Mr. Penfold. But she started away and seemed to find a sudden strength, and caught Dolly up in her arms. 'My darling, my darling,' she said, 'you have only me now—only me. Heaven help you, my poor, poor children.' And once more she burst into the shrill sighing sobs. It was Aunt Sarah who had been crying all the time for her brother who was dead.

This was the first echo of a mourning outcry that reached the children. They were told that the day was never to come now of which they had spoken so often; their father would never come home—they were orphans. George was to have a tall hat with crape upon it. Marker went into town to buy Dolly stuff for a new black frock. Aunt Sarah did not smile when she spoke to them, and told them that their mamma would soon be home now. Dolly could not understand it all very well. Their father had been but a remembrance; she did not remember him less because Lady Sarah's eyes were red and the letters were edged with black. Dolly didn't cry the first day, though Rhoda did; but in the night when she woke up with a little start and a moan from a dream in which she thought it was her papa who was lying by the pond, Aunt Sarah herself came and bent over her crib.

But next morning the daisies did not look less pretty, nor did the puppy cease to jump, nor, if the truth be told, did Dolly herself; nor would kind Stanham Vanborough have wished it. . . .

Robert came into the garden and found the children with a skipping-rope, and was greatly shocked, and told them they should not skip about.

'I was not skipping,' said Rhoda. 'I was turning the rope for Dolly.'

Dolly ran off, blushing. Had she done wrong? She had not thought so. I cannot say what dim unrealised feelings were in her little heart; longings never to be realised, love never to be fulfilled. She went up into her nursery, and hid there in a corner until Rhoda came to find her, and to tell her dinner was ready.

CHAPTER V.

STEEL PENS AND GOOSE QUILLS.

Virtue, how frail it is,
Friendship too rare;
Love, how it sells poor bliss
For proud despair.

THE letter announcing poor Stanham's death came from a Captain Palmer, a friend of Stan's, whose ship was stationed somewhere in that latitude, and who happened to have been with him at the time. They had been out boar-hunting in the marshes near Calcutta. The poor Major's illness was but a short one, produced by sunstroke, so the Captain wrote. His affairs were in perfect order. He had been handsomely noticed in the Bengal *Hurkaru*. Of his spiritual state Captain Palmer felt less able to speak. Although not a professed Christian, poor Stanham had for some time past attended the services of the Scotch chapel at Dum Dum, where Mr. McFlaggit had been permitted to awaken many sleepers to a deep sense of spiritual unrest. Captain Palmer believed that Major Vanborough had insured his life for 2,000*l*., and the widow and children would also be entitled to something from the regimental fund. Captain Palmer then went on to say that he had been attending another deathbed, that of a native gentleman, whose wives and orphan children having been left unprovided for, had been happily brought to see the past errors of their faith and

had come forward in a body. They were about to be sent to England under the charge of Miss M'Grudder, who had done so much good work among the Zenanas. Captain Palmer wound up by a friendly offer of assistance and a message from Mrs. Vanborough. She did not feel equal to writing, she was utterly prostrate. She sent fondest love, and would write by the next mail.

So this was the children's first taste of the fruit of the tree of life and death growing in that garden of Eden and childhood through which we all come wandering into life, a garden blooming still,—it may be, in the square before the house,—where little Adams and Eves still sport, innocent and uncareful for the future, gathering the fruits as they ripen in the sunshine, hearing voices and seeing their childish visions, naming the animals as a new creation passes before them.

Lady Sarah longed to get away when her first burst of grief was over. The sleepy, drowsy old place seemed to stifle her with its calm content and sunny indifference. But she wanted to hear more of Philippa's plans before she formed any of her own, and meanwhile she could cry unobserved within the old walls where she had loved poor Stan, and seen him grow up from a boy; no wonder, no triumphant paragon; but a kindly, gentle, simple creature, whom she had loved with all her heart, as Dolly now loved George, and without whom the world seemed a wanting place—though there were many wiser and more brilliant men left in it than poor Stanham Vanborough. Robert, after some incompetent attempts at consolation, was obliged to return to Cambridge.

Poor Mrs. Vanborough's 'plans' were rather vague, and all crossed one another and came on different scraps of papers, contradicting and utterly bewildering, though good Lady Sarah had docketed them and tied them up together

for more convenient reference. They were to write to her by every post, Philippa said. Why could they not come to her? She longed for her children. She scarcely knew how to bear her sorrow. She dreaded the journey, the cold, empty, home-coming, the life in England, so different from what she had dreamed. The doctor said it would be madness for her to move as yet. Her brother, Colonel Henley ('Dear Charles! he was goodness itself'), suggested Italy. Would Lady Sarah consent to this, and meet her with the children? Or would she even come as far as Paris? But there were difficulties in everything everywhere—cruel money difficulties, she was told. There was a lawsuit now coming on in the Calcutta Courts with the insurance office in which poor dear Stan had insured his life. Captain Palmer said her presence was necessary. If it was given against her, she was utterly penniless; and, meanwhile, harassed, detained. . . . Perhaps, on her return, she might take boarders or Indian children—would lady Sarah advertise at once. . . . ? What did George advise? When should she see them all again? Her heart yearned in vain—months might elapse. Dependence she could not bear. Even Sarah's kindness was bitter to her, when she thought of the past. All were kind—all was sad. The poor thing seemed utterly distracted.

Lady Sarah had written that Church House was her home, and that she must come at once to her home and her children.

Mrs. Vanborough wrote that this could not be. Alas, alas! it was only a bright dream, from which she sometimes awoke (so Philippa wrote) to find herself a mourner in a foreign land, watching the slow progress of the law.

'Why didn't she come?' wrote Lady Henley from the Court. 'When will she come?' the children asked. Her room was ready, the bed was made, the fire burning. Dolly

used to pick nosegays for her mamma's toilet-table, and stick pins in the cushion in stars. She made little bags of lavender to scent the great cabinet. It was one of those welcomes that are wasted in life, one of those guest-chambers made ready to which the guest does not come. They look just like any other rooms unless you know their history.

Dolly often followed Marker when she went in to see that all was in order. One day the fire blazed comfortably; although the rain was beating against the window, a gleam of sun came from the inner dressing-room, that looked out cross-ways along the garden. 'Do you think she will come soon, Marker?' Dolly asked, peeping about the room.

'I don't think nothing at all, my dear,' said Marker, poking the fire. 'Why don't you go and play with Miss Rhoda? She came with Mrs. Morgan just now.'

'Is Rhoda here?' cries Dolly, starting off instantly.

Rhoda was there; she had come with her aunt, who was talking to Lady Sarah in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Morgan took a very long time to say what she had to say, and had left Rhoda outside in the hall. The little girls listened to Mrs. Morgan's voice as it went on, and on, and on. They sat on the stairs and played at being ladies too, and Rhoda told Dolly a great many secrets that she was not to tell, in a mysterious whisper just like her aunt's. Mr. Raban was gone away, she said, and he had married somebody, and Aunt Morgan said she should never speak to him again, and Mrs. Penfold came crying, and Aunt Morgan scolded and scolded, and Rhoda thought Emma Penfold was gone too, and just then the drawing-room door opened; Mrs. Morgan came out, looking very busy and bustled off with Rhoda. Lady Sarah cut Dolly's questions very short and forbade her going to the cottage again.

It was the very next day that Dolly and Rhoda met old

Penfold walking in the lane, as they were coming home with Mademoiselle.

Gumbo ran to meet him, barking, wagging his tail, and creeping along the ground with delight.

Penfold, who had been passing on, stooped to caress the puppy's head with his brown creased hand, and seeing Dolly, he nodded kindly to her as she walked by with Mademoiselle.

'Has Emma come home to the cottage?' asked Rhoda, lingering.

Penfold frowned. His honest red face turned crimson. 'She's not come back, nor will she,' he said. 'She has got a 'usband now, and she is gone a-travellin', and if they hast you, you can tell them as I said so, Miss Rhoda, nor should I say otherwise if they was here to contradic' me.' He spoke in a fierce defiant way. Mademoiselle called shrilly to the children to come on.

Dolly looked after the old gardener as he slowly walked away down the lane: he looked very old and tired, and she wished her aunt had not told her to keep away from the cottage.

Emma's name was never mentioned; Raban's, too, was forgotten; Mrs. Vanborough still delayed from one reason and another.

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From MRS. VANBOROUGH *to the* LADY SARAH FRANCIS, *Church House, Kensington.*

Bugpore, April 1—, 18—.

DEAREST SARAH,—I fear that you will be totally unprepared (not more so, however, than I was myself) for a great and sudden change in my life of sad regrets (sad and regretful it will ever be), notwithstanding the altered circumstances which fate has forced upon me during the last few months that I have spent in sorrowful retirement, with spirits and health shattered and nerves unstrung. During these long lonely months, weighed down by care and harassed by business, which I was utterly incapable of understanding, I know not what would have become of me if (during my brother's absence on regimental duties) it had not been for the unremitting attention and generous devotion of one without whose support I now feel I could not bring myself to face the struggle

of a solitary life. For the sake of my poor fatherless children more even than for my own, I have accepted the name and protection of Captain Hawtry Palmer, of the Royal Navy, a sailor, of a family of sailors. Joanna, my brother's wife, was a Palmer, and from her I have often heard of Hawtry at a time when I little thought . . . You, dearest, who know me as I am, will rejoice that I have found rest and strength in another, though happiness I may not claim.

Captain Palmer is a man of iron will and fervent principle. He must make me good, I tell him, unless sadness and resignation can be counted for goodness. Your poor Philippa is but a faulty creature, frail and delicate, and of little power; and yet, with all my faults, I feel that I am necessary to him, and, wreck as I am, there are those who do not utterly forget me. And, as he says with his quaint humour, there is not much to choose between the saints and sinners of the world. A thousand thousand kisses to my precious children. You will bring them to meet me next year, will you not, when Captain Palmer promises that I shall return to my real home—for your home is my home, is it not?

For the present, I remain on a visit to my friend Mrs. M'Grudder, an intimate friend of Captain Palmer, with one only daughter.

The marriage will not, of course, take place for six weeks. Joanna will describe her brother to you. I am anxious to hear all she says about Hawtry and myself and our marriage. Pray announce my great news to my darlings. Let them write to me without reserve.

Ever, dearest Sarah,

Your very devoted

PHILIPPA.

Poor Lady Sarah read the letter one white, cold, east-windy day, when the sun shone, and the dry, parching wind blew the wreaths of dust along the ground. As she read the curious, heartless words, it seemed to her that the east-wind was blowing into the room,—into her heart,—drying up all faith in life, all tears for the past, all hope for the future. Had she a heart, this cruel woman, poor Stan's wife and Dolly's mother? Can women live and be loved, and bear children, and go through life without one human feeling, one natural emotion; take every blessing of God, and every sacred sorrow, and live on, without knowing either the blessing or the sorrow? Lady Sarah tore the letter up carefully and very quietly, for Dolly was by her

side, and would have asked to see it. She was not angry just then, but cold and sad, unspeakably sad. 'Poor woman!' she thought, 'was this all; this the end of Stan's tender life devotion; this the end of his pride and tender trust?' She could see him now, whispering to Philippa, as they sat together on the old bench by the pond, a handsome pair, people said, and well suited. Well suited! She got up shivering from her chair, and went to the fire, and threw the letter in, shred by shred, while the sun poured in fierce, and put out the flames.

'Are you cold, Aunt Sarah?' said Dolly, coming to her side. Sarah moved away. She was afraid that even now it was burnt Dolly might read the cruel letter in the fire. 'For my children's sake!' The little red flames seemed to be crackling the words, as they smouldered among the coals, and a shrill, sudden blast against the window seemed hissing out that Captain Palmer was a man of iron will. As they stood side by side, Lady Sarah looked steadily away from little Dolly's eyes, and told her that her mamma was going to marry again.

Poor Dolly turned the colour of the little flames when her aunt told her. She said nothing, not even to Rhoda, nor to Mrs. Morgan, who called immediately upon hearing the rumour. Lady Sarah was not at home, but Mrs. Morgan came in all the same, and closely questioned Dolly upon the subject.

'What is the gentleman's name, my dear?' she asked.

'I don't know,' said Dolly.

'Why, Mr. Palmer, to be sure,' said Rhoda.

In due time the news came of the marriage, and then poor Aunt Sarah had to wipe her eyes, and to give up writing on black-edged paper. The clocks went round and round, and the earth rolled on, and seasons spread their feasts, and the winds swept them away in turn; summer

burnt into autumn in cloud and vapour. The winter came closing in, and the snow fell thick upon the lanes and the gardens, on the Kensington house-tops and laurel-trees, on the old church tower, and the curate's well-worn waterproof cape, as he trudged to and fro. It fell on the old garden walls and slanting roof of Church House, with little Dolly, safe sheltered within, warming herself by the baked Dutch tiles.

CHAPTER VI.

DOWNSTAIRS IN THE DARK.

D'un linceuil de point d'Angleterre
Que l'on recouvre sa beauté . . .
Que des violettes de parme
Au lieu des tristes fleurs des morts,
Où chaque fleur est une larme,
Pleuvent en bouquets sur son corps.

—T. GAUTIER.

THERE are old houses in other places besides Kensington. Perhaps, it is from early associations that Dolly has always had so great a liking for walls furnished with some upholstery of the past, and set up by strong hands that seem to have had their own secrets for making their work last on. Some of these old piles stand like rocks, defying our lives as they have defied the generations before us. We come upon them everywhere, set upon high hills, standing in wide country-places, crowded into the narrow streets of a city. Perhaps it is the golden Tiber that flows past the old doorways, perhaps it is the Danube rushing by, or the grey Thames running to the marshes, or the Seine as it shines between the banks. There is an old house in the Champs Elysées at Paris where most English people have lived in turn, and to which Dolly's fate brought her when she was about twelve years old.

The prompter rings the bell, and the scene shifts to the

Maison Vâlin, and to one night, twenty years ago, when the two little girls were tucked up in bed. The dim night-light was put on the round marble table, the curtains were drawn, but all the same they could hear the noise of the horses trampling and the sabots clanking in the courtyard down below. Lady Sarah had sent her little niece to bed, and she now stood at the door and said, 'Good-night, my dears.' The second night-cap was only that of a little stray school-girl come to spend a holiday, from one of those vast and dreary establishments scattered all about the deserted suburbs of the great city: of which the lights were blazing from the uncurtained drawing-room windows, and its great semicircle of dark hills flashing.

Lady Sarah had come to Paris to meet Dolly's mamma, who had been married more than a year by this time, and who was expected home at last. She was coming *alone*, she wrote. She had at length received Captain Palmer's permission to visit her children; but not even her wishes could induce him to quit his beloved frigate. She should, therefore, leave him cruising along the Coromandel coast, and start in January, for which month her passage was taken. She implored Lady Sarah to meet her in Paris, where some weeks' rest would be absolutely necessary, she said, to recruit her strength after the fatigue of her journey; and Lady Sarah, with some misgiving, yielded to Dolly's wistful entreaties, and wrote to her old friend the Rev. W. Lovejoy, of the Marmouton Chapel, to take rooms for her for a few weeks, during which Dolly might improve her French accent and her style of dancing (Dolly had been pronounced clumsy by Mrs. Morgan) in the companionship of little Rhoda, who had been sent some time before to be established for a year in a boarding-school near Paris, there to put on the armour of accomplishments that she would require some day in the dismal battle of life.

John Morgan had been loth that the little girl should go; he was afraid the child might feel lonely away from them all; but Rhoda said, very sensibly, that, if she was to be a governess, she supposed she had better learn things. So Rhoda was sent off for a year to Madame Laplanche's, towards the end of which time Lady Sarah came to Paris with Dolly and the faithful Marker in attendance.

Dolly did not trouble her head very much about her accent, but she was delighted to be with her friend again, to say nothing of seeing the world and the prospect of meeting her mother. She went twice a week to Rhoda's school to learn to point her bronze toes and play on the well-worn piano; and then every morning came Madame de St. Honoré, an old lady who instructed Mademoiselle Dolli in the grammar and literature of the country to which she belonged. French literature, according to Madame de St. Honoré, was in one snuffy volume which she happened to possess. Dolly asked no questions, and greatly preferred stray scenes out of *Athalie* and odd pages from *Paul and Virginia* to Noel and Chapsal, and l'Abbé Gaultier's *Geography.* The two would sit at the dining-room table with the windows open, and the cupboards full of French china, and with the head of Socrates staring at them from over the stove.

Mr. Lovejoy had selected for his old friend a large and dilapidated set of rooms, the chairs and tables of which had seen better days, and had been in their prime during the classic furniture period of the Great Napoleon.

The tall white marble clock on the chimney-piece had struck nine, and Lady Sarah was sitting alone in the carpetless drawing-room on one of the stiff-backed chairs. It was early times for two girls of eleven and twelve to be popped away out of the world; but Lady Sarah was at that time a strict disciplinarian, and seemed to think that one of the

grand objects of life was to go to bed and to be up again an hour in advance of everybody else.

'And so there is only dreaming till to-morrow morning,' thought Dolly, with a dreary wide-awake sigh. Dolly and Henriette her maid had two beds side by side. Dolly used to lie wide-awake in hers, watching the dawn as it streamed through the old-flowered chintz curtains, and the shadows and pictures flying from the corners of the room; or, when the night-light burnt dimly, and the darkness lay heaped against the walls, Dolly, still childish for her age, could paint pictures for herself upon it, bright phantasmagorias woven out of her brain, faces and flowers and glittering sights such as those she saw when she was out in the day-time. Dolly thought the room was enchanted, and that fairies came into it as soon as Henriette was asleep and snoring. To-night little Rhoda was sleeping in the bed, and Henriette and Marker were sitting at work in the next room. They had left the door open; and, presently, when they thought the children were asleep, began a low, mysterious conversation in French.

'She died on Tuesday,' said Henriette, 'and is to be buried to-morrow.'

'She could not have been twenty,' said Marker; 'and a sweet pretty lady. I can't think where it is I have seen such another as her.'

'Pauvre dame,' said Henriette. 'He feels her death very much. He is half-distracted, Julie tells me.'

'Serve him right, the brute! I should like to give it him!' cries the other.

'He looks such a handsome smiling gentleman, that Mr. Rab—Rap—Who could have thought it possible?'

'Oh, they're all smiling enough,' said Marker, who knew the world. 'There was a young man in a grocer's shop——' And her voice sank into confidences still more mysterious.

'When they came to measure her for her coffin,' said Henriette, who had a taste for the terrible, 'they found she had grown since her death, poor thing. Julie tells me that she looks more beautiful than you can imagine. He comes and cries out, "Emma! Emma!" as if he could wake her and bring her to life.'

'Wake her and bring her to life to kill her again, the wretch!' said Marker, 'with his neglect and cruelty.'

'He is very young—a mere boy,' said Henriette. 'The concierge says there was no malice in him; and then he gave her such beautiful gowns! There was a moire-antique came home the day she died, with lace trimmings. Julie showed it me: she expects to get all the things. They were going to a ball at the Tuileries. How beautiful she would have looked!'

'Poor child!' said Marker.

'To die without ever putting it on! Dame, I should not like that; but I should like to have a husband who would buy me such pretty things. I would not mind his being out of temper now and then, and leaving me to do as I liked for a month or two at a time. I should have amused myself, instead of crying all day, as she did. Julie tells me she has tried on the black velvet, and it fits her perfectly.'

'Julie ought to be ashamed of herself,' growled Marker, 'with the poor child lying there still.'

'Not in the least,' said Henriette; 'Julie was very fond of her when she was alive—now she is dead—that is another thing. She says she would not stop in the room for worlds. She thought she saw her move yesterday, and she rushed away into the kitchen and had an *attaque de nerfs* in consequence.'

'But did she tell nobody—could it have been true?'

'Françoise told *him*, and they went in immediately, but it was all silent as before. I am glad I sleep upstairs: I

should not like to be in the room over that one. It is underneath there where are *les petites*.'

'She would do no one harm, now or when she was alive, poor thing,' said Marker. 'I should like to flay that man alive.'

'That would be a pity, Mrs. Marker,' said Henriette: 'a fine young man like that! He liked her well enough, allez! She cried too much: it was her own fault that she was not happy.'

'I would rather be her than him at this minute,' said Marker. 'Why he sulked and sneered and complained of the bills when he was at home, and went away for days together without telling her where he was going. I know where he was: he was gambling and spending her money on other people—I'd pickle him, I would!' said Marker; 'and I don't care a snap for his looks; and her heart is as cold as his own now, poor little thing.'

'It's supper-time, isn't it?' yawned Henriette.

Then Dolly heard a little rustle as they got up to go to their supper, and the light in the next room disappeared, and everything seemed very silent. The night-light spluttered a little, the noises in the courtyard were hushed, the familiar chairs and tables looked queer and unknown in the darkness. Rhoda was fast asleep and breathing softly; Dolly was kicking about in her own bed, and thrilling with terror and excitement, and thinking of what she had heard of the poor pretty lady downstairs. She and Rhoda always used to rush to the window to see her drive off in her smart little carriage, wrapped in her furs, but all alone. Poor little lady! her unkind husband never went with her, and used to leave her for weeks at a time. Her eyes used to shine through the veil that she always wore when they met her on the stairs; but Aunt Sarah would hurry past her, and never would talk about her. And now she was dead. Dolly

looked at Rhoda lying so still on her white pillow. How would Rhoda look when she was dead, thought Dolly.

'Being asleep is being dead. . . . I daresay people would be more afraid of dying if they were not so used to go to sleep. When I am dying—I daresay I shall die about seventeen—I shall send for John Morgan, and George will come from Eton, and Aunt Sarah will be crying, and, perhaps, mamma and Captain Palmer will be there; and I shall hold all their hands in mine and say, "Now be friends, for my sake." And then I shall urge George to exert himself more, and go to church on week-days; and then to Aunt Sarah I shall turn with a sad smile, and say, "Adieu! dear aunt, you never understood me—you fancied me a child when I had the feelings of a woman, and you sneered at me, and sent me to bed at eight o'clock. Do not crush George and Rhoda as you have crushed me: be gentle with them;" and then I shall cross my hands over my chest and—and what then?' And a sort of shock came over the girl as, perhaps for the first time in her life, she realised the awful awakening. 'Suppose they bury me alive? It is very common, I know—oh! no, no, no; that would be too horrible! Suppose that poor young lady is not dead downstairs—suppose she is alive, and they bury her to-morrow, and she wakes up, and it is all dark, and she chokes and cries out, and nobody hears. . . . Surely they will take precautions?—they will make sure. . . . Who will, I wonder? Not that wicked husband—not that horrid maid. That wicked man has gone to gamble, I daresay; and Julie is trying on her dresses, and perhaps her eyes are opening now and nobody to see—nobody to come. Ah! this is dreadful. I must go to sleep and forget it.'

Little Rhoda turned and whispered something in her dreams; Dorothy curled herself up in her nest and shut her eyes, and did go to sleep for a couple of hours, and then

woke up again with a start, and thought it must be morning. Had not somebody called her by name? did not somebody whisper Dolly in her ear? so loud that it woke her out of a strange dream: a sort of dream in which strange clanging sounds rung round and round in the air; in which Dolly herself lay powerless, gasping and desperate on her bed. Vainly she tried to move, to call, to utter; no one came.

Julie, in white satin, was looking at herself in the glass; the wicked husband was standing in the door with a horrible scowl. Rhoda, somehow, was quietly asleep in her bed. Ah! no, she, too, was dead; she would never wake; she would not come and save her. And just then Dolly awoke, and started up in bed with wide open childish eyes. What a still quiet room—what a dim light from the lamp—who had spoken? Was it a warning? was it a call? was this dream sent to her as a token? as the people in the Bible dreamt dreams and dared not disobey them? Was this what was going on in the room below? was it for her to go down and save the poor lady, who might be calling to her? Something within her said 'Go, go,' and suddenly she found herself standing by the bedside, putting on her white dressing-gown, and then pattering out bare-footed across the wooden floors, out into the dark dining-room, out into the ante-room, all dark and black, opening the front door (the key was merely turned in the lock), walking down-stairs with the dim lamps glimmering and the moonlight pouring in at the blindless window; and standing at the door of the apartment below. Her only thought was wonder at finding it so easy. Then she laid her hand softly on the lock and turned it, and the door opened, and she found herself in an ante-room like their own, only carpeted and alight. The room was under her own: she knew her way well enough. Into the dark dining-room she passed with a

beating heart, and so came to a door beneath which a ray of light was streaming. And then she stopped. Was this a dream? was this really herself? or was she asleep in bed upstairs? or was she, perhaps, dead in her coffin? A qualm of terror came over her—should she turn and go?—her knees were shaking, her heart was beating so that she could hardly breathe; but she would not turn back—that would be a thousand times too cowardly. Just then she thought she heard a footstep in the dining-room. With a shuddering effort she raised her hand, and in an instant she stood in the threshold of the chamber. What, was this a sacred chapel? Silence and light, many flowers, tall tapers burning. It seemed like an awful dream to the bewildered child: the coffin stood in the middle of the room, she smelt a faint odour of incense, of roses, of scented tapers, and then her heart stood still as she heard a sudden gasping sigh, and against the light an awful shrouded figure slowly rising and seeming to come towards her. It was more than she could bear: the room span round, once more the loud clanging sounded in her ears, and poor Dolly, with a shuddering scream, fell to the ground.

* * * * *

A jumble of whispers, of vinegar, of water trickling down her back, and of an officious flapping wet handkerchief; of kind arms enfolding her: of nurse saying, 'Now she is coming to;' of Lady Sarah answering, 'Poor little thing, she must have been walking in her sleep'—a strange new birth, new vitality pouring in at all her limbs, a dull identity coming flashing suddenly into life, and Dolly opened her eyes to find herself in the nurse's arms, with her aunt bending over her, in the warm drawing-room upstairs. Other people seemed standing about—Henriette and a man whom she could scarcely see with her dim weary eyes, and Julie. Dolly hid her face on the nurse's shoulder.

'Oh, nurse, nurse! have you saved me?' was all she could say.

'What were you doing downstairs, you naughty child?' said Lady Sarah, in her brisk tones. 'Marker heard a noise and luckily ran after you.'

'Oh, Aunt Sarah, forgive me!' faltered Dolly. 'I went to save the lady—I thought if she opened her eyes and there was no one there—and Julie trying on the dresses, and the wicked husband—I heard Henriette telling Marker——Oh, save me, save me!' and the poor little thing burst into tears and clung closer and closer.

'You are all safe, dear,' said Marker, 'and the young lady is at rest where nothing will frighten or disturb her. Hush! don't cry.'

'Poor little thing,' said the man, taking her hand; 'the nuns must have frightened her.' And he raised the child's hand to his lips and kissed it, and then seemed to go away.

'I'm ashamed of myself, my lady,' said Marker, 'for having talked as I did with the chance of the children being awake to hear me. It was downright wicked, and I should like to bite my tongue out. Go to bed, Henriette. Be off, Mamzelle July, if you please.'

'We are all going to bed; but Henriette will get Miss Dolly a cup of chocolate first,' said Lady Sarah.

Dolly was very fond of chocolate; and this little impromptu supper by the drawing-room fire did more to quiet and reassure her than anything else. But she was hardly herself as yet, and could only cling to Marker's arm and hide her face away from them all. Her aunt kissed her once more, saying, 'Well, I won't scold you to-night; indeed, I am not sure but that you were quite right to go,' and disappeared into her own room. Then Henriette carried the candle, and Marker carried great big Dolly and laid her down by Rhoda in her bed, and the wearied and tired little girl fell asleep at last, holding Rhoda's hand.

CHAPTER VII.

CLOUD-CAPPED TOWERS AND GORGEOUS PALACES.

Lo! what wrong was her life to thee, Death?
—Rossetti.

When Dolly awoke next morning Rhoda was dressed and her bed was empty. The window had been opened, but the light was carefully shaded by the old brown curtains. Dolly lay quite still; she felt strangely tired, and as if she had been for a very long journey, toiling along a weary road. And so she had, in truth; she had travelled along a road that no one ever retraces, she had learnt a secret that no one ever forgets. Henceforth in many places and hours the vision that haunts each one of us was revealed to her; that solemn ghost of Death stood before her with its changing face, at once sad and tender and pitiless. Who shall speak of it? With our own looks, with the familiar eyes of others, it watches us through life, the good angel and comforter of the stricken and desolate, the strength of the weak, the pitiless enemy of home and peaceful love and tranquil days. But perhaps to some of us the hour may come when we fall into the mighty arms, feeling that within them is the home and the love and the peace that they have torn from us.

Dolly was still lying quite quiet and waiting for something to happen, when the door opened, and her aunt's maid came in carrying a nice little tray with breakfast upon it. There was a roll, and some French butter in a white scroll-like saucer, and Dolly's favourite cup.

'My lady is gone out, Miss Dolly,' said Marker, 'but she left word you was not to be disturbed. It is eleven o'clock, and she is going to take you and Miss Rhoda for a treat when she gets back.'

'A treat!' said Dolly, languidly; 'that will be nice. Marker, I have to push my arms to make them go.'

But when Dolly had had her bath and eaten her breakfast, her arms began to go of themselves. Once, indeed, she turned a little sick and giddy, for, happening to look out of window into the courtyard below, she saw that they were carrying away black cloths and silver-spangled draperies, which somehow brought up the terror of the night before; but her nurse kissed her, and made her kneel down and say her prayers, and told her in her homely way that she must not be afraid, that life and death were made by the same Hand, and ruled over by the same Love. 'The poor young lady was buried this morning, my dear,' said Marker, 'before you were awake. Your aunt went with the poor young man.'

Marker was a short, stout, smiling old woman. Lady Sarah was tall and thin, and silent, and scant in dress, with a brown face and grey hair; she came in, in her black gown, from the funeral, with her shaggy kind eyes red with tears.

'You won't forget, my lady, that you promised the young ladies a treat,' said Marker, who was anxious that Dolly should have something fresh to think of.

'I have not forgotten,' said Dolly's aunt, smiling, as she looked at the two children. 'Rhoda must get a remembrance to take back to school, mustn't she, Dolly? I have ordered a carriage at two.'

There is a royal palace familiar to many of us of which the courts are shining and busy, and crowded with people. Flowers are growing among fountains and foliage, and children are at play; there is a sight of high gabled roofs

overhead enclosing it, so do the long lines of the ancient arcades. Some music is playing to which the children are dancing. In this strange little world the children seem to grow up to music in beautiful ready-made little frocks and pinafores, the grown-up people seem to live on grapes and ices and bonbons, and on the enormous pears displayed in the windows of the cafés. Everything is more or less gilt and twinkling,—china flowers bloom delicate and scentless; it would seem as if the business of life consisted in wandering here and there, and sipping and resting to the sound of music in the shade of the orange-trees, and gazing at the many wonders displayed; at the gimcracks and trinkets and strings of beads, the precious stones, and the silver and gold, and the fanciful jewels. Are these things all dust and ashes? Here are others, again, of imitation dross and dust, shining and dazzling too; and again, imitations of imitations for the poorest and most credulous, heaped up in harmless glitter and array. Here are opera-glasses to detect the deceptions, and the deceptions to deceive the glasses,—bubbles of pomp, thinnest gilding of vanity and good-humour.

Some twenty years ago Dorothea Vanborough and a great many ladies and gentlemen her contemporaries were not the respectable middle-aged people they are now, but very young folks standing on tip-toe to look at life, which they gazed at with respectful eyes, believing all things, hoping all things, and interested in all things beyond words or the power of words to describe. My heroine was a blooming little girl, with her thick wavy hair plaited into two long tails. She wore a great flapping hat and frilled trousers, according to the barbarous fashion of the time. Little Rhoda was shorter and slighter, with great dark eyes and a wistful pale face; she was all shabbily dressed, and had no frills like Dolly, or flowers in her hat. The two stood gazing at the portrait of

a smiling little Prince with a blue ribbon, surmounted by a wreath of flowers, glazed and enclosed in a gilt-locket. I suppose the little girls of the present[1] bear the same sort of allegiance to the Prince Imperial that Dolly felt for the little smiling Count of Paris of those days. For the King his grandfather, for the Dukes and Princes his uncles, hers was a very vague devotion; but when the old yellow royal coaches used to come by rumbling and shaking along the Champs Elysées, Dolly for one, followed by her protesting attendant, would set off running as hard as she could, and stand at the very edge of the pavement in the hopes of seeing her little smiling Prince peep out of the carriage-window. He was also to be seen in effigy on cups, on pin-boxes, and bonbons, and, above all, to be worn by the little girls in the ornamental fashion I have described. He smiled impartially from their various tuckers; and, indeed, many of the youthful possessors of those little gilt lockets are true to this day to their early impressions.

So both Dolly and Rhoda came to tell Lady Sarah that they had made up their minds, what they most admired.

The widow had been sitting upon one of the benches in the garden, feeling not unlike the skeleton at a feast—a scanty figure in the sunshine, with a heart scarcely attuned to the bustle and chatter around her, but she began to tell herself that there must be some use even in the pomps and vanities of life, when she saw how happy the little girls looked, how the light had come into Dolly's eyes, and then she gave them each a solid silver piece out of a purse, which, contrary to the custom of skeletons, she held ready in her hand.

'Oh, thank you,' says Dolly; 'now I can get no end of things. There's George and Robert and ——'

'It is much better to buy *one* nice thing to take care of

[1] Written before recent events in France.

than a great many little ones,' said Rhoda, philosophically. 'Dolly, you don't manage well. I don't want to get everything I see. I shall buy that pretty locket. None of the girls in my class have got one as pretty.'

'Come along quick then,' said Dolly, 'for fear they should have sold it.'

They left the Palais Royal at last and drove homewards with their treasures. Dolly never forgot that evening; the carriage drove along through the May-lit city, by teeming streets, by shady avenues, to the sounds of life and pleasure-making. Carriages were rolling along with them; long lines of trees, of people, of pavements led to a great triumphal archway, over which the little pink clouds were floating, while an intense sweet thrill of spring rung in the air and in the spirits of the people. Henriette opened the door to them when they got home.

'The poor gentleman from below,' she said, 'is waiting for you in the drawing-room. I told him you would not be long.'

The gentleman was waiting in the drawing-room as Lady Sarah came in with the two little girls shyly following. She would have sent them away, but a sort of shyness habitual to her made her shrink from a scene or an explanation. It may have been some feeling of the same sort which had induced the widower to go away to the farthest window of the room, where he stood leaning out with his back turned for an instant after they had come in.

Coming in out of the dazzle of the streets, the old yellow drawing-room looked dark and dingy; the lights reflected from the great amphitheatre without struck on the panelled doors and fusty hangings. All these furnished houses have a family likeness: chairs with Napoleon backs and brass-bound legs, tables that cry *vive l'empire* as plain as tables

can utter, old-fashioned secretaries standing demure with their backs against the wall, keeping their counsel and their secrets (if there *are* such things as secrets). The laurel-crowned clocks tick beneath their wreaths and memorials of bygone victories, the looking-glasses placidly relate the faces, the passing figures, the varying lights and changes as they pass before them. To-night a dusky golden light was streaming into the room from behind the hills, that were heaving, so Dolly thought, and dimming the solemn glow of the sky: she saw it all in an instant; and then, with a throb she recognised this wicked husband coming from the window where he had been standing with his back to them. She had never seen him before so close, and yet she seemed to know his face. He looked very cruel, thought Dolly; he had a pale face and white set lips, and a sort of dull black gleam flashed from his eyes. He spoke in a harsh voice. He was very young—a mere boy, with thick fair hair brushed back from his haggard young face. He might have been, perhaps, about two or three and twenty.

'I waited for you, Lady Sarah. I came to say good-by,' he said. 'I am going back to London to-night. I shall never forget your ——' His voice broke. 'How good you have been to me,' he said hoarsely, as he took the two thin hands in his and wrung them again and again.

The widow's sad face softened as she told him 'to have trust, to be brave.'

'You don't know what you say,' he said in a common-place way. 'God bless you.' He was going, but seeing the two, Dolly and Rhoda, standing by the door looking at him with wondering faces, he stopped short. 'I forgot,' he said, still in his hard matter-of-fact voice, 'I brought a cross of Emma's; I thought she would wish it. It won't bring ill-luck,' he said, with a ghastly sort of laugh. 'She bore crosses enough in her life, poor soul, but this one, at least,

had no nails in it. May I give it to your little girl?' he said, 'unless she is afraid to take anything from me.'

Lady Sarah did not say no, and the pale young man looked vaguely from one to the other of the two little girls as they stood there, and then he took one step towards Dolly, who was the biggest, and who was standing, straight and tall for her age, in her light-coloured dress, with her straw hat hanging on her arm. I don't know how to write this of my poor little heroine. If he had seemed more unhappy, if he had not looked so strangely and spoken so oddly, she might have understood him better; but as it was, she thought he was saying terrible things, laughing and jeering and heartless: so judged Dolly in an innocent severity. Is it so? Are not the children of this world wiser in their generation than the children of light? Are there not depths of sin and repentance undreamt of by the pure in spirit? One seems to grasp at a meaning which eludes one as one strains at it, wondering what is the sermon to be preached upon this text. . . . It was one that little Dolly, still playing in her childish and peaceful valley, could not understand. She might forgive as time went on; she had not lived long enough yet either to forgive or to forget; never once had it occurred to her that any thought of hers, either of blame or forgiveness, could signify to any other human being, or that any word or sign of hers could have a meaning to any one except herself.

Dolly was true to herself, and in those days she used to think that all her life long she would be always true, and always say all she felt. As life grows long, and people, living on together through time and sorrow and experience, realise more and more the complexities of their own hearts, and sympathise more and more with the failings and sorrows of others, they are apt to ask themselves with dismay if it is a reality of life to be less and less uncompromising as

complexities increase, less true to themselves as they are more true to others, and if the very angels of God are wrestling and at war in their hearts. All through her life Dolly found, with a bitter experience, that these two angels of charity and of truth are often very far apart until the miracle of love comes to unite them. She was strong and true; in after days she prayed for charity; with charity came sorrow, and doubt, and perplexity. Charity is long-suffering and kind, and thinks no evil; but then comes truth crying out, 'Is not wrong wrong; is not falsehood a lie?' Perhaps it is because truth is not for this life that the two are at variance, until the day shall come when the light shall come, and with the light peace and knowledge and love, and then charity itself will be no longer needed.

And so Dolly, who in those days had scarcely realised even human charity in her innocent young heart, looked up and saw the wicked man who had been so cruel to his wife coming towards her with a gift in his hand; and as she saw him coming, black against the light of the sunset, she shrank away behind Rhoda, who stood looking up with her dark wistful eyes. The young man saw Dolly shrink from him, and he stopped short; but at the same instant he met the tranquil glance of a trustful upturned face, and, with a sigh, he put the cross (shimmering with a sudden flash of light) into little Rhoda's soft clasping hand.

'You are not afraid, like your sister? Will you keep it for Emma's sake?' he said again, in a softer voice.

There was a moment's silence. Lady Sarah, never, at the best of times, a ready woman, tried to say something, but the words died away. Dolly looked up, and her eyes met the flash of the young man's two wild burning eyes. They seemed to her to speak. 'I saw you shrink away,' they seemed to say. 'You are right; don't come near me—don't come near me.' But this was only unspoken language.

'Good-by,' he said suddenly to Lady Sarah. 'I am glad to have seen you once more,' and then he went quickly out of the room without looking back, leaving them all standing scared and saddened by this melancholy little scene.

The lights were burning deeper behind the hills; the reflections were darker. Had there been a sudden storm? No; the sun had set quietly behind Montmartre, where the poor girl was lying there upon the heights above the city. Was it Dolly who was trembling, or was it the room that seemed vibrating to the echo of some disastrous chords that were still ringing in her ears?

Dolly went to the window and leant out over the wooden bar, looking down into the rustling glooming lilac garden below. How sad the scent of the lilac-trees in flower seemed as it came flooding up! She was still angry, but she was sorry too, and two great tears fell upon the wooden bar against which she was leaning. She always remembered that evening when she smelt lilac in flower.

Rhoda was very much pleased with her cross.

'I shall hang it on a black ribbon,' said the child, 'and always think of the poor gentleman when I wear it; and I shall tell the girls in class all about him and how he gave it to me.'

'How you took it from him, you mean,' said Lady Sarah, shortly.

'No, indeed, Lady Sarah; he gave it to me,' cried Rhoda, clutching her treasure quite tight.

CHAPTER VIII.

IMMORTELLES.

O lieb so lang du lieben kannst,
O lieb so lang du lieben magst,
Die Stunde kommt, die Stunde kommt,
Wo du am Graben stehst und klagst.

FRANK RABAN, having left the three standing silent and sorry in the calm sunset room, ran down to his own apartment on the floor beneath. He was to go back to England that night: he felt he could not stay in that place any longer; the memories seemed to choke him, and to rise up and madden him. As he came now down the echoing stairs he heard the voices of his servants: the front door was wide open. The concierge was standing in the passage in his shirt-sleeves; M. Adolphe was discoursing; a milliner was waiting with her bill. 'Not two years married,' he heard them saying; 'as for him, he will console himself.' Their loud voices suddenly hushed as he appeared. Adolphe flung the door open still wider for his master; but the master could not face them all, with their curious eyes fixed upon him, and he turned and fled down-stairs. Only two years since he had carried her away from her home in the quiet suburban cottage—poor Emma, who wanted to be married, and who had never loved him! Where was she now? Married only two years! What years! And now his remorse seemed almost greater than he could bear. He crossed the crowded road, heedless of the warning cries of

the drivers, pushing his way across the stream; then he got into a deserted country close upon the bustle of the main thoroughfare (they call it Beaujon), where great walls run by lonely avenues, and great gates stand closed and barred. Would they burst open? Would *she* come out with a pale avenging face and strike him? She, poor child! Whom did she ever strike in word or thought? Once he got a little ease: he thought he had been a very long way, and he had wandered at last into an ancient lane by a convent wall, beyond the modern dismal Beaujon, in the friendly older quarter. Lime-trees were planted in this tranquil place. There was a dim rain-washed painting upon the wall, a faint vista of fountains and gardens, the lilac-trees were blooming behind it, and the vesper song of the nuns reached his ears. He stood still for an instant, but the song ceased.

The old avenue led back to the great round Place in front of the Arc; for, in those days, neither the ride nor the great new roads were made which now lead thronging to the Bois. And the tide came streaming to the end of the long avenue of the Champs Elysées and no farther, and turned and ebbed away again from the gates of the Douane. Beyond them, the place was silent. The young man hurried on, not caring where he went. If I had loved her, if I had loved her—was the burthen of his remorse. It was almost heavier than he could bear. There were some children swinging on the chains that separate the great arch from the road; the last rays of the sun were lighting the stones and the gritty platform; twilight was closing in. I think if it had not been for the children, he would have thrown himself down upon the ground. They screamed shrilly at their play, and the echo from under the great vault gave back their voices. A few listless people were standing about; a countryman spelling out by the dying lights the pompous lists of victories that had been carved into the

stone—Jena, Marengo, Austerlitz. Chiller and more death-like came the twilight creeping on: the great carved figures blew their trumpets, waved their stony laurels, of which the shadows changed so many times a day. He staggered to a bench; he said to himself, 'I should like this Arc to fall down upon my head and crush me. I am a devil, I am not a man. I killed her with neglect, with reproach, and suspicion! But for me she would have been alive now, smiling as when I first saw her. I will go away and never be heard of any more. Go away—how can I go from this curse? could Cain escape?' Then he began to see what was all round about him again, see it distorted by his mad remorse. All the great figures seemed writhing their arms and legs; the long lists of battle seemed like funeral processions moving round and round him, fighting and thundering and running into one another. The Arc itself was a great tomb where these legions lay buried. Was it not about to fall with a stupendous crash; and would the dead people come rising round about at the blast of the trumpets of stone. Here was an Emperor who had wanted to conquer the whole world, and who had all but attained his object. Here was he, a man who had not striven for victory, but yielded to temptation; a man who had deserted his post, betrayed his trust, cursed a life that he should have cherished. Though his heart were broken on a wheel and his body racked with pain, that would not mend the past, sanctify it, and renew it again.

A sort of cold sweat lay upon his forehead; some children were playing, and had come up to the stone bench where he was sitting, and were making little heaps of dust upon it. One of them looked into his face and saw him clench his hand, and the little thing got frightened and burst out crying. The other, who was older, took the little one by the hand and led it away.

Of what good was it thinking over the past? It was over. Emma was dead, lying up on the heights towards which Dolly had been looking from her window. He had been to blame; but not to blame as he imagined in his mad remorse and despair. He had been careless and impatient, and hard upon her, as he was now hard upon himself. He had married her from a sense of honour, when his boyish fancy was past. His duty was too hard for him, and he had failed, and now he was free.

It was that very evening—Dolly remembered it afterwards—a letter came from her mother, written on thin lilac paper, in a large and twisted handwriting, sealed and stamped with many Indian stamps. Dolly's mother's letters always took a long time to read; they were written up and down and on different scraps of paper. Sometimes she sent whole bouquets of faded flowers in them to the children, sometimes patterns for dresses to be returned. Henriette brought the evening's mail in with the lamp and the tea-tray, and put the whole concern down with a clatter of cups and saucers on the table before Lady Sarah. There was also a thick blue lawyer-looking letter with a seal. The little girls peeped up shyly as Lady Sarah laid down her correspondence unopened beside her. She was a nervous woman and afraid of unread letters: but after a little she opened the lilac epistle, and then began to flush, and turned eagerly to the second.

'Who is that from?' Dolly asked at last. 'Is it from Captain Palmer?'

'Her aunt laid one thin brown hand upon the letter, and went on pouring out the tea without speaking. Rhoda looked for a moment, and then stooped over her work once more. Long years afterwards the quiet atmosphere of that lamp-lit room used to come round about Dolly again. The

log fire flamed, the clock ticked on. How still it was! the leaves of her book scraped as she turned them, and Rhoda stuck her silken stitches. The roll of the carriages was so far away that it sounded like a distant sea. They were still sitting silent, and Dolly was wondering whether she might speak of the letter again and of its contents, when there came an odd muffled sound of voices and exclamations from the room underneath.

'Listen!' said Rhoda.

'What can it be?' said Dolly, shutting up her book and starting up from her chair as Henriette appeared at the door, with her white cap-strings flying, breathless.

'They were all disputing downstairs,' she said. 'Persons had arrived that evening. It was terrible to hear them.'

Lady Sarah impatiently sent Henriette about her business, and the sounds died away, and the little girls were sent off to bed. In the morning, her aunt's eyes were so red that Dolly felt sure she must have been crying. Henriette told them that the gentleman was gone. 'Milady had been sent for before he left: she had lent him some money,' said Henriette, 'and paid the milliner's bill;' but the strange people who had come had been packing up and carrying off everything, to Julie's disgust.

Events and emotions come very rarely alone, they fly in troops, like the birds. It was that very day that Lady Sarah told Dolly that she had had some bad news—she had lost a great deal of money. An Indian bank had failed in which they all had a share.

'Your mamma writes in great trouble,' said Lady Sarah, reading out from a lilac scrap. '"Tell my precious Dolly that this odious bank will interfere once more with my heart's longing to see her. Captain Palmer insists

upon a cruel delay. I am not strong enough to travel round the Cape as he proposes. You, dear Sarah, might be able to endure such fatigue; but I, alas! have not the power. Once more my return is delayed."'

'Oh, Aunt Sarah, will she ever come?' said Dolly, struggling not to cry. . . . Dolly only cheered up when she remembered that they were ruined. She had forgotten it, in her disappointment, about her mother. 'Are we really ruined?' she said, more hopefully. 'We should not have spent that money yesterday. Shall we have to leave Church House? Poor mamma! Poor Aunt Sarah!'

'Poor Marker is most to be pitied,' said Lady Sarah, 'for we shall have to be very careful, and keep fewer maids, and wear out all our old dresses; but we need not leave Church House, Dolly.'

'Then it is nothing after all,' said Dolly, again disappointed. 'I thought we should have had to go away and keep a shop, and that I should have worked for you. I should like to be your support in your old age, and mamma's too.'

Then Lady Sarah suddenly caught Dolly in her arms, and held her tight for a moment—quite tight to her heart, that was beating tumultuously.

The next time Rhoda came out of her school for a day's holiday, Lady Sarah took the little girls to a flower-shop hard by. In the window shone a lovely rainbow of sun-rays and flowers; inside the shop were glass globes and china pots, great white sprays of lilacs, lilies, violets, ferns, and hyacinths, and golden bells, stuck into emerald-blue vases, all nodding their fragrant heads. Lady Sarah bought a great bunch of violets, and two yellow garlands made of dried immortelles.

'Do you know where we are going?' she asked.

Dolly didn't answer; she was sniffing, with her face buried in a green pot of mignonette.

'May I carry the garlands?' said Rhoda, raising her great round eyes. 'I know we are going to the poor lady's grave.'

Then they got into the carriage, and it rolled off towards the heights.

They went out beyond the barriers of the town by dusty roads, with acacia-trees; they struggled up a steep hill, and stopped at last at the gate of the cemetery. All round about it there were stalls, with more wreaths and chaplets to sell, and little sacred images for the mourners to buy for the adornment of the graves. Children were at play, and birds singing, and the sunlight streamed bright. Dolly cried out in admiration of the winding walks, shaded with early green, the flowers blooming, the tombs and the garlands, and the epitaphs, with their notes of exclamation. She began reading them out, and calling out so loudly, that her aunt had to tell her to be quiet. Then Dolly was silent for a little, but she could not help it. The sun shone, the flowers were so bright; sunshine, spring-time, sweet flowers, all made her tipsy with delight; the thought of the kind, pretty lady, who had never passed her without a smile, did not make her sad just then, but happy. She ran away for a little while, and went to help some children, who were picking daisies and tying them by a string.

When she came back, a little sobered down, she found that her aunt had scattered the violets over a new-made grave, and little Rhoda had hung the yellow wreath on the cross at its head.

Dolly was silent, then, for a minute, and stood, looking from her aunt, as she stood straight and grey before her, to little Rhoda, whose eyes were full of tears. What was there written on the cross?—

TO EMMA,
THE WIFE OF FRANCIS RABAN,
AND ONLY DAUGHTER OF DAVID PENFOLD, OF EARLSCOURT,
IN THE PARISH OF KENSINGTON.
DIED MARCH 20, 18—. AGED 22.

'Aunt Sarah,' Dolly cried, suddenly, seizing her aunt's gown, 'tell me, was that young Mr. Raban from John Morgan's house and Emma from the cottage? When he looked at me once I thought I knew him, only I didn't know who he could be.'

'Yes, my dear,' said Lady Sarah; 'I did not suppose that you would remember them.'

'I remembered,' said Rhoda, nodding her head; 'but I thought you did not wish me to say so.'

'Why not?' asked Lady Sarah. 'You are always imagining things, Rhoda. I had forgotten all about them myself; I had other things on my mind at the time they married,' and she sighed and looked away.

'It was when Dolly's papa——' Rhoda began.

'Mr. Raban reminded me of Kensington before he left, said Lady Sarah, hastily, in her short voice. 'I was able to help him, foolish young man. It is all very sad, and he is very unhappy and very much to blame.'

This was their only visit to poor Emma Raban's grave. A few days after, Lady Sarah, in her turn, left Paris, and took Dolly and little Rhoda, whose schooling was over, home to England. Rhoda was rather sorry to be dropped at home at the well-known door in Old Street, where she lived with her Aunt Morgan. Yes, it would open in a minute, and all her old life would begin again. Tom and Joe and Cassie were behind it, with their loud voices. Dolly envied her; it seemed to her to be a noisy elysium of welcoming exclamations into which Rhoda disappeared.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BOW-WINDOWED HOUSE.

You'll love me yet, and I can tarry
Your love's protracted growing;
You reared that bunch of flowers you carry,
From seeds of April's sowing.

RHODA, as she sat at her work, used to peep out of the bow-windows at the people passing up and down the street—a pretty girlish head, with thick black plaits pinned away, and a white frill round the slender throat. Sometimes, when Mrs. Morgan was out, Rhoda would untwist and unpin, and shake down a cloud upon her shoulders; then her eyes would gleam with a wild wilful light, as she looked at herself in the little glass in the workbox, but she would run away if she heard any one coming, and hastily plait up her coils. The plain-speaking and rough-dealing of a household not attuned to the refinements of more sensitive natures had frightened instead of strengthening hers. She had learnt to be afraid and reserved. She was timid and determined, but things had gone wrong with her, and she was neither brave nor frightened in the right way. She had learnt to think for herself, to hold her own secretly against the universal encroachments of a lively race. She was obliging, and ready to sacrifice her own for others, but when she gave up, she was conscious of the sacrifice. She could forgive her brother unto seven times. She was like the disciple, whose sympathy did not reach unto seventy times seven.

Rhoda was not strong, like Cassie and Zoe. She was often tired, as she sat there in the window-corner. She could not always touch the huge smoking heaps that came to table. When all the knives and forks and voices clattered together, they seemed to go through her head. The bells and laughter made her start. She would nervously listen for the boys' feet clattering down the stairs. At Church House there was a fresh silence. You could hear the birds chirruping in the garden all the time Lady Sarah was reading aloud. There were low comfortable seats covered with faded old chintz and tapestry. There were Court ladies hanging on the walls. One wore a pearl necklace; she had dark bright eyes, and Rhoda used to look at her, and think her like herself, and wonder. There were books to read and times to read them at Church House, and there was Dolly always thinking how to give Rhoda pleasure. If she exacted a certain fealty and obedience from the little maiden, her rule was different from Aunt Morgan's. Dolly had no sheets to sew, no dusty cupboards to put straight, no horrible boys' shirts to front or socks to darn and darn and darn, while their owners were disporting themselves out of doors, and making fresh work for the poor little Danaides at home.

To Dolly, Old Street seemed a delightful place. She never could understand why Rhoda was so unhappy there. It seemed to Dolly only too delightful, for George was for ever going there when he was at home. The stillness of Church House, its tranquil order and cheerful depression, used to weary the boy; perhaps it was natural enough. Unless, as Rhoda was, they are constitutionally delicate, boys and girls don't want to bask all day long like jelly-fish in a sunny calm; they want to tire themselves, to try their lungs; noise and disorder are to them like light and air, wholesome tonics with which they brace themselves for the coming struggles of life. Later in life there are sometimes

quite old girls and boys whose vitality cannot be repressed. They go up mountains and drive steam-engines. They cry out in print, since it would no longer be seemly for them to shriek at the pitch of their voices, or to set off running violently, or to leap high in the air.

'The Morgans' certainly meant plenty of noise and cheerful clatter, the short tramp of schoolboy feet, huge smoking dishes liberally dispensed. John Morgan would rush in pale, breathless, and over-worked; in a limp white neckcloth as befitted his calling, he would utter a breathless blessing on the food, and begin hastily to dispense the smoking heap before him.

'Take care, John, dear,' cries Mrs. Morgan.

'What? where?' says John. 'Why, George! come to lunch? Just in time.'

It was in John Morgan's study that George established himself after luncheon. The two windows stood open as far as the old-fashioned sashes would go. The vine was straggling across the panes, wide-spreading its bronzed and shining leaves. The sunlight dazzled through the green, making a pleasant flicker on the walls of the shabby room, with its worn carpet and old-fashioned cane chairs and deal book-cases.

A door opened into an inner room, through which George, by leaning forward from his arm-chair behind the door, can see Mrs. Morgan's cap-ribbons all on end against the cross-light in the sitting-room windows. Cassie is kneeling on the floor, surrounded by piles of garments; while her brother, standing in the middle of the room, is rapidly checking off a list of various ailments and misfortunes that are to be balanced in the scales of fate by proportionate rolls of flannel and calico. Good little Cassie Morgan feels never a moment's doubt as she piles her heaps—so much sorrow, so many petticoats; so much hopeless improvidence, so many

pounds of tea and a coal-ticket. In cases of confirmed wickedness, she adds an illuminated text sometimes, and a hymn-book. Do they ever come up, these hymn-books and bread-tickets cast upon the waters? Is it so much waste of time and seed? After all, people can but work in their own way, and feel kindly towards their fellow-creatures. One seed is wasted, another grows up; as the buried flora of a country starts into life when the fields are ploughed in after years.

'Go on, Cassie,' says Mrs. Morgan: 'Bonker—Wickens —Costello.'

'Costello is again in trouble,' says John. 'It is too bad of him, with that poor wife of his and all those children. I have to go round to the Court about him now. Tell George I shall be back in ten minutes.'

'I have kept some clothes for them,' said Cassie. 'They are such nice little children,' and she looks up flushed and all over ravellings at the relenting curate, who puts Mrs. Costello down in his relief-book.

All over John Morgan's study, chairs and tables, such books are lying, with pamphlets, blue books, black books, rolls and registers, in confusion, and smelling of tobacco.

In this age of good reports and evil reports people seem like the two boys in Dickens's story, who felt when they had docketed their bills that they were as good as paid. So we classify our wrongs and tie up our miseries with red tape; we pity people by decimals, and put our statistics away with satisfied consciences. John Morgan wrote articles from a cold and lofty point of view, but he left his reports about all over the room, and would rush off to the help of any human being, deserving or undeserving. He had a theory that heaven had created individuals as well as classes; and at this very moment, with another bang of the door, he was on his way to the police-court, to say a good word for the

intemperate Costello, who was ruefully awaiting his trial in the dark cell below.

George, although comfortably established in the Morgan study, was also tired of waiting, and found the house unusually dull. For some time past he had been listening to a measured creaking noise in the garden; then came a peal of bells from the steeple; and he went to the window and looked out. The garden was full of weeds and flowers, with daisies on the lawn, and dandelions and milkwort among the beds. It was not trimly kept, like the garden at home; but George, who was the chief gardener, thought it a far pleasanter place, with its breath of fresh breeze, and its bit of blue over-roof. For flowers, there were blush-roses, nailed against the wall, that Rhoda used to wear in her dark hair sometimes, when there were no earwigs in them; and blue flags, growing in the beds among spiked leaves, and London pride, and Cape jessamine, very sweet upon the air, and also ivy, creeping in a tangle of leaves and tendrils. The garden had been planted by the different inhabitants of the old brown house—each left a token. There was a medlar-tree, with one rotten medlar upon a branch, beneath which John Morgan would sit and smoke his pipe in the sun, while his pupils construed Greek upon the little lawn. Only Carlo was there now, stretching himself comfortably in the dry grass (Carlo was one of Bunch's puppies, grown up to be of a gigantic size and an unknown species). Tom Morgan's tortoise was also basking upon the wall. The creaking noise went on after the chimes had ceased, and George jumped out of window on to the water-butt to see what was the matter. He had forgotten the swing. It hung from a branch of the medlar-tree to the trellis, and a slim figure, in a limp cotton dress, stood clinging to the rope—a girl with a black cloud of hair falling about her shoulders. George stared in amaze-

ment. Rhoda had stuck some vine-leaves in her hair, and had made a long wreath, that was hanging from the swing, and that floated as she floated. She was looking up with great wistful eyes, and for a minute she did not see him. As the swing rose and fell, her childish wild head went up above the wall and the branches against the blue, and down 'upon a background of pure gold,' where the Virginian creeper had turned in the sun. George thought it was a sort of tune she was swinging, with all those colours round about her in the sultry summer day. As he leaped down, a feeling came over him as if it had all happened before, as if he had seen it and heard the creaking of the ropes in a dream. Rhoda blushed and slackened her flight. He seemed still to remember it all while the swing stopped by degrees; and a voice within the house began calling, 'Rhoda! Rhoda!'

'Oh! I must go,' said Rhoda, sighing. 'I am wasting my time. Please don't tell Aunt Morgan I was swinging.'

'Tell her!' said George. 'What a silly child you are. Why shouldn't you swing?'

'Oh! she would be angry,' said Rhoda, looking down. 'I *am* very silly. I can't bear being scolded.'

'Can't you?' says George, with his hands in his pockets. 'I'm used to it, and don't mind a bit.'

'I shouldn't mind it if . . . if I were you, and any one cared for me,' said Rhoda, with tearful eyes. She spoke in a low depressed voice.

'Nonsense,' said George; 'everybody cares for everybody. Dolly loves you, so—so do we all.'

'Do you?' said Rhoda, looking at him in a strange wistful way, and brightening suddenly, and putting back all her cloudy hair with her hands. Then she blushed up, and ran into the house.

When George told Dolly about it, Dolly was very sympathising, except that she said Rhoda ought to have answered

when her aunt called her. 'She is too much afraid of being scolded,' said Dolly.

'Poor little thing!' said George. 'Listen to this,' and he sat down to the piano. He made a little tune he called 'The Swing,' with a minor accompaniment recurring again and again, and a pretty modulation.

'It is exactly like a swing,' said Dolly. 'George, you must have a cathedral some day, and make them sing all the services through.'

'I shall not be a clergyman,' said George, gravely. 'It is all very well for Morgan, who is desperately in love. He has often told me that it would be his ruin if he were separated from Mrs. Carbury.'

George, during his stay in Old Street (he had boarded there for some weeks during Lady Sarah's absence), had been installed general confidante and sympathiser, and was most deeply interested in the young couple's prospects.

'I believe Aunt Sarah has got a living when old Mr. Livermore dies,' he went on, shutting up the piano and coming to the table where Dolly was drawing. 'We must get her to present it to John Morgan.'

'But she always says it is for you, George, now that the money is lost,' said Dolly. 'I am afraid it will not be any use asking her. George, how much is prudent?'

'How much is how much?' says George, looking with his odd blue eyes.

'I meant prudent to marry on?' says Dolly.

'Oh, I don't know,' says George, indifferently. 'I shall marry on anything I may happen to have.'

'What are you children talking about?' said Lady Sarah, looking up from her corner by the farthest chimney-piece. She liked one particular place by the fire, from which she could look down the room at the two heads that were bending together over the round table, and out into the garden,

where a west wind was blowing, and tossing clouds and ivy sprays.

'We are talking about prudence in marriage,' says George.

'How can you be so silly!' says Lady Sarah, sharply. At which George starts up offended and marches through the window into the garden.

'What is it?' said the widow. 'Yes, Dolly, go to him,' she said, in answer to Dolly's pleading eyes. 'Foolish boy!'

The girl was already gone. Her aunt watched the white figure, flying with wind-blown locks and floating skirts along the ivy wall. Dolly caught her brother up by the speckled holly-tree, and the two went on together, proceeding in step to a triumphant music of sparrows overhead, a wavering of ivy along their path; soft winds blew everywhere, scattering light leaves; the summer's light was in the day, and shining from the depth of Dolly's grey eyes. The two went and sat down on the bench by the pond, the old stone-edged pond, that reflected scraps of the blue green overhead; a couple of gold-fishes alternately darted from side to side. George forgot that he was not understood as he sat there throwing pebbles into the water. Presently the wind brought some sudden voices close at hand, and, looking up, they saw two people advancing from the house, Robert Henley walking by Lady Sarah and carrying her old umbrella.

'Oh, he is always coming,' said George, kicking his heels, and not seeming surprised. 'He is staying with his grandmother at the Palace, but they don't give him enough to eat, and so he drops into the Morgans', and now he comes here.'

'Hush!' said Dolly, looking round.

Robert Henley was a tall, handsome young fellow, about twenty, with a straight nose and a somewhat pompous manner. He was very easy and good-natured when it was not

too much trouble; he would patronise people both younger and older than himself with equally good intentions. George's early admiration for his cousin I fear is now tinged with a certain jealousy of which Robert is utterly unconscious; he takes the admiration for granted. He comes up and gives Dolly an affable kiss. 'Well, Dolly, have you learnt to talk French? I want to hear all about Paris.'

'What shall I tell you?' says simple Dolly, greatly excited. 'We had such a pretty drawing-room, Robert, with harps on all the doors, and yellow sofas, and such a lovely, lovely view.' And Lady Sarah smiled at Dolly's enthusiasm, and asked Robert if he could stay to dinner.

'I shall be delighted,' says Robert, just like a man of the world. 'My grandmother has turned me out for the day.'

CHAPTER X.

A SNOW GARDEN.

For every shrub, and every blade of grass,
And every pointed thorn seemed wrought in glass;
In pearls and rubies rich the hawthorns show,
While through the ice the crimson berries glow . .
The spreading oak, the beech, and towering pine,
Glazed over, in the freezing æther shine;
The frighted birds the rattling branches shun,
That wave and glitter in the distant sun.

—PHILLIPS.

Is it that evening or another that they were all assembled in the little bow-windowed drawing-room in Old Street listening to one of Rhoda's interminable 'pieces' that she learnt at her French school? And then came a quartette, but she broke down in the accompaniment, and George turned her off the music-stool.

The doors were open into John's inner room, from which came a last western gleam of light through the narrow windows, and beyond the medlar-tree. It would have been dark in the front room but for those western windows. In one of them sat Lady Sarah leaning back in John's old leathern chair, sitting and listening with her hands lying loosely crossed in her lap; as she listened to the youthful din of music and voices and the strumming piano and the laughter. She had come by Dolly's special request. Her presence was considered an honour by Mrs. Morgan, but an effort at the same time. In her endeavours to entertain her

guest, Mrs. Morgan, bolt upright in another corner, had fallen asleep, and was nodding her head in this silent inner room. There was noise and to spare in the front room, people in the street outside stopped to listen to the music.

When George began to play it seemed another music altogether coming out of the old cracked yellow piano; smash, bang, crack, he flew at it, thumping the keys, missing half the notes, sometimes jumbling the accompaniment, but seizing the tune and spirit of the music with a genuine feeling that was irresistible.

'Now all together,' cries George, getting excited.

It was an arrangement of one of Mendelssohn's four-part songs. 'As pants the hart,' sang Rhoda, shrill and sweet, leading the way. 'As pants the hart,' sang George, with a sort of swing. 'As pants the hart,' sang Dolly, carefully and restrainedly. She sang with great precision for a child of her age, quietly, steadily; but even her brother's enthusiasm did not inspire her. George flung his whole impulse into his music, and banged a chord at her in indignation at her tameness. John Morgan piped away with a face of the greatest seriousness, following his pupil's lead; he had much respect for George's musical capabilities. Cassie and Zoe sang one part together, and now and then Robert Henley came out with a deep trumpet-like note, placing it when he saw an opportunity. Dolly laughed the first time, but Rhoda's dark eyes were raised admiringly. So they all stood in the twilight, nodding their heads and clearing their voices, happy and harmlessly absorbed. They might have stood for a choir of angels; any one of the old Italian masters might have painted them as they sang, with the addition of lilies and wings, and gold glories, and the little cherubim who seemed to have flitted quite innocently out of ancient mythologies into the Légende Dorée of our own

days; indifferently holding the music for a St. Cecilia, or the looking-glass for the Mother of Love.

Dolly, with her flowing locks, stood like a little rigid Raphael maiden, with eyes steadily fixed upon her scroll. Rhoda blushed, and shrilled and brightened. How well a golden glory would have become her dark cloudy hair.

As the room darkened Cassie set some lights, and they held them to read their music by. George kept them all at work, and gave no respite except to Rhoda, whose feelings he feared he had hurt. 'Please come and turn over my music, Rhoda,' he said. 'Dolly's not half quick enough.'

He had found some music in an old box at home the day before, some old-fashioned glees, with a faded and flourishing dedication to the Right Honourable the Countess of Churchtown, and then in faint ink, S. C. 1799.

It was easy music, and they all got on well enough, picking out the notes. Lady Sarah could remember her mother playing that same old ballad of 'Ye gentlemen of England' when she was herself quite a little girl. One old tune after another came, and mingled with Mrs. Morgan's sleeping, Lady Sarah's waking dreams of the past that was her own, and of the future that was to be for others; as the tunes struck upon her ear, they seemed to her like the new lives all about her repeating the old notes with fresh voices and feelings. George was in high good humour, behaving very well until Robert displeased him by taking somebody else's part; the boy stopped short, and there might have been some discussion, but Mrs. Morgan's fat maid came in with the tray of gingerbread nuts, and the madeira and orange wine, that the hospitable old lady delighted to dispense, and set it down with a jingle in the back-room where the elder ladies were sitting.

This gingerbread tray was the grand closing scene of the

entertainment, and Robert affably handed the wine-glasses, and John Morgan, seizing the gingerbread nuts, began scattering them all about the room as he forced them upon his unwilling guests. He had his sermon to finish for the next day, and he did not urge them to remain. There was a little chattering in the hall: Dolly was tied up and kissed and tucked up in her shawl; Lady Sarah donned a capoche (as I think she called it); they stepped out into the little star-lit street, of which the go-to-bed lights were already burning in the upper windows. Higher still Orion and his mighty company looked down upon the humble illumination of the zigzag roofs. The door of the bow-windowed house opened to let out the voices. 'Good-night,' cried everybody, and then the door closed and all was silent again, except for the footsteps travelling down the street.

Fifteen or twenty years ago, as I have said, Dolly Vanborough and the other ladies and gentlemen her contemporaries were not the respectable middle-aged people they are now, but for the most part foolish young folks just beginning their lives, looking out upon the world with respectful eyes, arrogant,—perhaps dogmatic, uncertain,—but with a larger belief, perhaps a more heroic desire, than exists among them now. To-day, for a good many of them, expediency seems a great discovery, and the stone that is to turn everything to gold. Take things as you find them, do so and so, not because you feel inclined, or because it is right and generous, but because the neighbours are looking on, it is expected of you; and then, with our old friend the donkey-man, we stagger off, carrying the ass upon our shoulders. I suppose it is a law of nature that the horizon should lower as we climb down the hill of life, only some people look upwards always, 'And stumble among the briers and tumble into the well.' This is true enough, as regards my heroine, who was often in trouble, often disappointed,

ashamed, angry, but who will persist in her star-gazing to the end of her journey.

When Dolly was nearly fifteen, her brother George was eighteen, and had just gone to college, starting in high spirits, and with visions of all the letters of the alphabet before him, and many other honourable distinctions. Dolly, dazzled, helped to pack his portmanteau.

'Oh, I wish I was going too!' Dolly said; 'girls never do anything, or go anywhere.'

'Mamma wants you to go to India,' said George.

'But the Admiral won't have me,' says Dolly; 'he wrote to Aunt Sarah about it, and said they were coming home. Are you going to take all these pipes and French novels?'

'I can never study without a pipe,' said George; 'and I must keep up my French.'

Dolly and Lady Sarah were disappointed when George, notwithstanding these appliances for study, returned without any special distinctions. The first Christmas that he came back, he brought Robert Henley with him. The old grandmother in the Palace was dead, and the young man had no longer a lodging in Kensington. The two arrived after dinner, and found Lady Sarah established by the fire in the oak parlour. They had come up driving through a fierce Christmas wind from the station, and were glad of Dolly's welcome and comfortable cups of tea.

When Dolly awoke next morning up in her little room, the whole country was white with snow. The iron wind was gone, the rigid breath of winter had sobbed itself away, the soft new-fallen snow lay heaped on the fields and the hedges, on the fir-trees and laurels. Dolly ran to the window. George and Robert were out in the garden already. Overhead was a blue, high heaven; the white snow-country she could see through her window was sparkling and dazzling

white. Sharp against the heavens stood the delicate branches of the trees, prismatic lights were radiating from the sloping lawns, a light veil of fallen drift wreathed the distant coppices; and Dolly, running downstairs soon after, found the dining-room empty, except for the teapot, and she carried her breakfast to the window. She had scarcely finished when George and Robert both came tapping at the pane.

'Come out,' cried George.

'Let her finish her breakfast,' said Robert.

'I've done,' cried Dolly, gaily jumping up and running to fetch her hat and her coat, and to tie up her long skirts. Dolly possessed a warm fur cloak, which had been Lady Sarah's once, in the days of her prosperity, and which became the girl so well that her aunt liked her to wear it. Henley, standing by a frozen cabbage in the kitchen-garden, watched her approvingly as she came along the snowy path. All her brown furs were glistening comfortably; the scarlet feather in her hat had caught the light and reflected it on her hair.

Dolly's hair was very much the colour of seal-skin, two-coloured, the hollows of its rippling locks seemed dark while the crests shone like gold. There was something autumnal in her colours. Dolly's was a brilliant russet autumn, with grey skies and red berries and warm lights. She had tied a scarlet kerchief round her neck, but the snow did not melt for all her bright colours. How pretty it was! leaves lying crisped and glittering upon the white foaming heaps, tiny tracks here and there crossing the pathways, and then the bird-steps, like chainlets lightly laid upon the smooth, white field. Where the sun had melted the snow in some sheltered corner, some red-breasts were hopping and bobbing; the snow-sheets glittered, lying heavy on the laurel-leaves on the low fruit walls.

Robert watched her coming, with her honest smiling face. She stopped at the end of the walk to clear away a corner of the bed, where a little colony of snowdrops lay crushed by a tiny avalanche that had fallen upon their meek heads. It was the work of an instant, but in that instant Dolly's future fate was decided.

For, as my heroine comes advancing unconscious through this snow and diamond morning, Henley thinks that is the realization of a dream he has sometimes dreamt, and that the mistress of his future home stands there before him, bright and bonnie, handsome and outspoken. Dorothy rules him with the ascendency of a youthful, indifferent heart, strong in its own reliance and hope; and yet this maiden is not the person that she thinks herself, nor is she the person that Henley thinks her. She is strong, but with an artificial strength not all her own; strong in the love of those round about her, strong in youth and in ignorance of evil.

They walked together down the garden walks and out into the lanes, and home again across the stile. 'Dolly,' said Robert, as they were going in, 'I shall not forget our morning's expedition together—will you, too, promise me ——?' He stopped short. 'What are those?' he said, sentimentally; 'snowdrops?' and he stooped to pick one or two. Dolly also turned away. 'Here is something that will remind you ——' Robert began.

'And you,' cries Dolly, flinging a great snow heap suddenly into his face and running away. It was very babyish and vulgar, but Robert looked so solemn that she could not resist the impulse. He walked back to the house greatly offended.

CHAPTER XI.

RABAN MEETS THE SHABBY ANGEL.

Christ hath sent us down the angels,
And the whole earth and the skies
Are illumed by altar-candles,
Lit for blessed mysteries.
And a Priest's hand through creation
Waveth calm and consecration. . . .

—E. B. B.

SOMETIMES winter days come in autumn, just as hours of old age and middle age seem to start out of their places in the due rotation of life and to meet us on the way. One October evening in the following year a damp fog was spreading over London, the lights from the windows streamed faintly upon the thick veils of vapour. Many noisy shadows were out and about, for it was Saturday night, and the winding Kensington thoroughfare was almost blocked by the trucks and the passers-by. It was only six o'clock, but the last gleam of light had died away behind the western chimney-tops; and with the darkness and notwithstanding the fog, a cheerful saturnalia had begun. A loitering, a clamouring through the clouds of mist, witches with and without broom-sticks, little imps darting through the crowd, flaring trucks drawn up along the road, housewives bargaining their Sunday dinners. It seemed a confusion of darkness, candles, paper-shades, oranges, and what not. Now and then some quiet West End carriage would roll by, with lamps burning, through the mist, and horses trampling steadily. Here and

there, a bending head might be seen in some lighted window —it was before the time of Saturday half-holidays—the forge was blazing and hard at work, clink clank fell the iron strokes, and flames flashed from the furnace.

Beyond the church, and the arch, and the forge, the shop-lights cease, the fog seems to thicken, and a sudden silence to fall upon everything; while the great veils spread along the road, hiding away how many faces, hearths, and homelike rays. There are sometimes whole years in one's life that seem so buried beneath some gloomy shadow; people come and go, lights are burning, and voices sound, but the darkness hangs over everything, and the sun never seems to rise. A dull-looking broad-shouldered young man with a beard had come elbowing his way through the crowd, looking about him as he came along. After a moment's hesitation he turned up a side lane, looming away out of the region of lamps. It was so black and silent that he thought at first he must have been mistaken. He had been carefully directed, but there seemed no possibility of a house. He could just make out two long walls; a cat ran hissing along the top of one of them, a wet foggy wind flickered in his face, and a twig broke from some branch overhead. Frank Raban, for it was he, wondered if the people he was in search of could be roosting on the trees or hiding behind the walls this damp evening.

He was turning back in despair when suddenly a door opened, with a flash of light, through the brickwork, and a lantern was held out.

'Good-night,' said a loud, cheerful voice; 'why, your street lamp is out; take my arm, Zoe. Go in, Dorothea, you will catch cold.' And two figures, issuing from the wall like apparitions in the *Arabian Nights*, passed by hurrying along—a big, comfortable great-coat and a small dark thing tripping beside it. Meanwhile, the person who had let them

out peeped for an instant into the blackness, holding the lantern high up so as to throw its light upon the lane. There came a sudden revelation of the crannies of an old brick wall; of creeping, green ivy, rustling in the light which seemed to flow from leaf to leaf; and of a young face smiling upon the dim vapours. It was all like the slide of a magic-lantern passing on the darkness. Raban almost hesitated to come forward, but the door was closing on the shining phantasmagoria.

'Does Lady Sarah Francis live here?' he said, coming up.

The girl started—looked at him. She, in turn, saw a red beard and a pale face appearing unexpectedly, and with a not unnatural impulse she half closed the door. 'Yes,' she said, retreating a step or two towards the house, which Raban could now see standing ghost-like within the outer wall. It was dimly lighted, here and there, from the deep windows; it seemed covered with tangled creepers; over the open hall door an old-fashioned stone canopy still hung, dripping with fog and overgrown with ivy.

The girl, with her lantern, stood waiting on the steps. A blooming maiden, in a dark green dress, cut in some quaint old-fashioned way, and slashed with black. Her dress was made of coarse homely stuff, but a gold chain hung round her neck; it twinkled in the lantern light. Her reddish-brown hair was pinned up in pretty twists, and some berries glistend among its coils.

'If you want to *see* Lady Sarah,' she said, a little impatiently, 'come in, and shut the garden door.'

He did as he was bid. She ran up the steps into the house, and stood waiting in the old hall, scanning him still by her lamplight. She had put the lantern on a corner of the carved chimney-sill, from whence its glimmers fell upon oaken panels and black-and-white flags of marble, upon a dark oak staircase winding up into the house.

'Will you go in there?' said the girl, in a low voice, pointing to an open door.

Then she quickly and noiselessly barred and fixed the heavy bolts; her hands slid along the old iron hasps and hooks. Raban stood watching her at work; he found himself comparing her to an ivy plant, she seemed to bloom so freshly in the damp and darkness, as she went moving hither and thither in her odd green gown. The next minute she was springing up the staircase. She stopped, however, on the landing, and leaned over the banisters to point again, with a stiff quick gesture, to the open door.

Raban at last remembered that he had not given his name. 'Will you kindly say that———'

But the green dress was gone, and Raban could only walk into the dark room, and make his way through unknown passes to a smouldering fire dying on the hearth. On his way he tumbled over a growl, a squeak. Then a chair went down, and a cat gave a yell, and sprang into the hall. It was an odd sort of place, and not like anything that Raban had expected. The usual proprieties of life have this advantage, that people know what is coming, and pull at a wire with a butler or a parlour-maid at the other end of it, who also know their parts and in their turn correspond with an invisible lady upstairs, at the right-hand corner of the drawing room fire-place. She is prepared to come forward with a nice bow, and to point to the chair opposite, which is usually on castors, so that you can pull it forward, and as you sit down you say, 'I daresay you may remember,' or 'I have been meaning to,' or, &c.

But the whole machinery seemed wanting here, and Frank Raban remained in the dark, looking through the unshuttered black windows, or at the smouldering ashes at

his feet. At first he speculated on the ivy-maiden, and then as the minutes went by and no one came, his mind travelled back through darkness all the way to the last time he had met Lady Sarah Francis, and the old sickening feeling came over him at the thought of the past. In these last few years he had felt that he must either fight for life or sink for ever. It was through no merit of his own that he had not been utterly wrecked; that he was here to-night, come to repay the debt he owed; that, more fortunate than many, he had struggled to shore. Kind hands had been held out to help him to drag safe out of the depths. Lady Sarah's was the first; then came the younger, firmer grasp of some of his companions, whom he had left but a year or two ago in the old haunts, before his unlucky start in life. It was habit that had taken him back to these old haunts at a time when, by a fortunate chance, work could be found for him to do. His old friends did not fail him; they asked no questions; they did not try to probe his wounds; they helped him to the best of their ability, and stood by him as men stand by each other, particularly young men. No one was surprised when Mr. Raban was elected to one of the tutorships at All Saints'. He had taken a good degree, he had been popular in his time, though now he could not be called a popular man. Some wondered that it should be worth his while to settle down upon so small an inducement. Henley, of St. Thomas's, had refused it when it was pressed upon him. Perhaps Raban had private means. He had lived like a rich man, it was said, after he left college. Poor Frank! Those two fatal years had eaten up the many lean kine that were to follow. All he had asked for now was work, and a hope of saving up enough to repay those who had trusted him in his dismay. His grandfather had refused to see him after his marriage. Frank was too proud a man to make

advances, but not too proud to work. He gratefully took the first chance that came in his way. The morning he was elected he went to thank one or two of his supporters. He just shook hands, and said 'Thank you;' but they did not want any fine speeches, nor was Frank inclined to make them.

Three years are very long to some people, while they are short to others. Mrs. Palmer had spent them away from her children not unpleasantly, except for one or two passing differences with the Admiral, who had now, it was said, taken to offering up public prayers for Philippa's conversion. Lady Sarah had grown old in three years. She had had illness and money troubles, and was a poor woman comparatively speaking. Her hair had turned white, her face had shrunk, while Dolly had bloomed into brightness, and Frank Raban had grown into middle age, as far as hope and feeling went. There he sat in the warm twilight, thinking of the past—ah, how sadly! He was strong enough for to-day, and not without trust in the future; but he was still almost hopeless when he thought of the past. He had not forgiven himself. His was not a forgiving nature, and as long as he lived, those two fatal years of his life would make part of his sorrowful experience. Once Sarah Francis had tried to tell him—(but many things cannot be understood except by those who have first learnt the language)—that for some people the only possible repentance is to do better. Mere repentance, that dwelling upon past misery and evil doing, which people call remorse, is, as often as not, madness and meaningless despair.

Sometimes Frank wondered now at the irritation which had led him to rebel so furiously at his fate. Poor, gentle fate! he could scarcely understand his impatience with it now. Perhaps, if Emma had lived——

We often, in our blindness, take a bit of our life, and look

at it apart as an ended history. We take a phase incomplete, only begun, perhaps, for the finished and irrevocable whole. Irrevocable it may be, in one sense, but who shall say that the past is completed because it is past, any more than that we ourselves are completed because we must die? Frank had not come to look at his own personal misdoings philosophically (as what honest man or woman would), or with anything but shrinking pain, as yet; he could bear no allusion to those sad days.

'You know Paris well, I believe Mr. Raban,' said some young lady. 'How long is it since——'

He looked so odd and angry that she stopped quite frightened. Dark fierce lines used to come under his heavy eyes at the smallest attempt to revive what was still so recent and vivid. If it was rude he could not help it.

He never spoke of himself. Strangers used to think Raban odd and abrupt when he sometimes left them in the middle of a sentence, or started away and did not answer. His old friends thought him changed, but after a great crisis we are used to see people harder. And this one talks, and you think he has told you all; and that one is silent, and he thinks he has told you nothing. And feelings come and go, the very power to understand them comes and goes, gifts and emotions pass, our inmost feelings change as we go on wandering through the narrow worlds that lie along the commonest commonplaces and ways of life. Into what worlds had poor Frank been wandering as he stood watching the red lights dull into white ashes by the blue tiles of the hearth!

Presently a lantern and two dark heads passed the window.

'Where is he?' said a voice in the hall. 'Dolly, did you say Mr. Raban was here? What! all in the dark?'

The voice had reached the door by this time, and some

one came and stood there for an instant. How well he remembered the kindly croaking tones! When he heard them again, it seemed to him as if they had only finished speaking a minute before.

Some one came and stood for an instant at the doorway. No blooming young girl with a bright face and golden head, but a grey-haired woman, stooping a little as she walked. She came forward slowly, set her light upon the table, and then looked at him with a pair of kind shaggy eyes, and put out her long hand as of old.

Raban felt his heart warm towards the shabby face, the thick kindly brows. Once that woman's face had seemed to him like an angel's in his sorest need. Who says angels must be all young and splendid; will there not be some comforting ones, shabby and tender, whose radiance does not dazzle nor bewilder; whose faces are worn, perhaps, while their stars shine with a gentle tremulous light, more soothing to our aching, earth-bound hearts than the glorious radiance of brighter spirits? Raban turned very red when he saw his old friend. 'How could you know I was here? You have not forgotten me?' he said; not in his usual reluctant way, but speaking out with a gentle tone in his voice. 'I should have come before, but I——' Here he began to stammer and to feel in his pocket. 'Here it is,' and he pulled out a packet. 'If it hadn't been for you I should never have had the heart to set to work again. I don't know what I should have done,' he repeated, 'but for you.' And then he looked at her for an instant, and then, with a sudden impulse, Raban stooped—as he did so she saw his eyes were glistening—he stooped and kissed her cheek.

'Why, my dear?' said Lady Sarah, blushing up. She had not had many kisses in her life. Some people would as soon have thought of kissing the poker and tongs.

Frank blushed up too and looked a little foolish; but he

quickly sobered down again. 'You will find it all right,' said Raban, folding her long thin hand over the little parcel, 'and good-night, and thank you.'

Still Lady Sarah hesitated. She could not bear to take it. She felt as though he had paid her twice over; that she ought to give it back to him, and say, 'Here, keep it. I don't want your money, only your kiss and your friendship. I was glad to help you.' She looked up in his pale face in a strange wistful way, scanning it with her grey eyes. They almost seemed to speak, and to say, 'You don't know how I want it, or I would not take it from you.'

'How changed you are!' she said at last, speaking very slowly. 'I am afraid you have been working too hard to pay me. I oughtn't to——' He was almost annoyed by this wistful persistency. Why did she stand hesitating? Why did she not take it, and put it in her pocket, and have done with it? Now again she was looking at the money with a pathetic look. And meanwhile Raban was wondering, Could it be that this woman cared for money—this woman, who had forced her help upon him so generously? He hated himself for the thought. This was the penalty, he told himself, for his own past life. This fatal suspicion and mistrust of others: even his benefactress was not to be spared.

'I must be going,' he said, starting away in his old stiff manner. 'You will let me come again, won't you?'

'Come again! Of course you will come again,' Lady Sarah said, laying her thin fingers on his arm. 'I shall not let you go now until you have seen my Dolly.' And so saying, she led him back into the hall. 'Go in, you will find her there. I will come back,' said Lady Sarah, abruptly, with her hand on the door-handle. She looked quite old and feeble as she leant against the oak. Then again she seemed to remember herself. 'You—you will not say anything of this,' she added, with a sudden imploring look; and she opened

her thin fingers, still clutching the packet of bank-notes and gold, and closed them again.

Then he saw her take the lantern from the chimney and hurriedly toil up the stairs, and he felt somehow that she was going to hide it away.

What would he have thought if he could have seen her safe in her own room, with the sovereigns spread out upon the bed and the bank-notes, while the poor soul stood eagerly counting over her store. Yes, she loved money, but there were things she loved still more. Sarah Francis, alone in the world, might have been a miser if she had not loved Dolly so dearly—Dolly, who was Stan's daughter. There was always just this difference between Lady Sarah and open-handed people. With them money means little—a moment's weakness, a passing interest. With Lady Sarah to give was doubt, not pleasure; it meant disorder in her balanced schemes; it meant truest self-denial: to give was to bestow on others what she meant for Dolly's future ease and happiness; and yet she gave.

CHAPTER XII.

DOROTHEA BY FIRELIGHT.

The waunut logs shot sparkles out
Towards the pootiest, bless her,
An' leetle fires danced all about
The chiny on the dresser;
The very room, coz she was in,
Looked warm from floor to ceilin'.

—LOWELL.

LADY SARAH had left Raban to go into the drawing-room alone. It was all very strange, he thought, and more and more like a crazy dream. He found himself in a long room of the colour of firelight, with faded hangings, sweeping mysteriously from the narrow windows, with some old chandeliers swinging from the shadows. It seemed to him, though he could not clearly see them, that there were ghosts sitting on the chairs, denizens of the kingdom of mystery, and that there was a vague flit and consternation in the darkness at the farther end of the room, when through the opening door the gleam of the lantern, which by this time was travelling upstairs, sped on with a long slanting flash. For a moment he thought the place was empty; the atmosphere was very warm and still; the firelight blazed comfortably; a coal started from the grate, then came a breath, a long, low, sleepy breath from a far-away corner. Was this a ghost? And then, as his eyes got accustomed, he saw that the girl who had let him in sat crouching by the fire. Her

face was turned away; the light fell upon her throat and the harmonious lines of her figure. Raban, looking at her, thought of one of Lionardo's figures in the Louvre. But this was finer than a Lionardo. What is it in some attitudes that is so still, and yet that thrills with a coming movement of life and action? It is life, not inanimately resting, but suspended from motion as we see it in the old Greek art. That flying change from the now to the future is a wonder sometimes written in stone; it belongs to the greatest creations of genius as well as to the living statues and pictures among which we live.

So Dolly, unconscious, was a work of art, as she warmed her hands at the fire: her long draperies were heaped round about her, her hair caught the light and burnt like gold. If Miss Vanborough had been a conscious work of art she might have remained in her pretty attitude, but being a girl of sixteen, simple and somewhat brusque in manners, utterly ignoring the opinions of others, she started up and came to meet Raban, advancing quick through the dimness and the familiar labyrinth of chairs.

'Hush—sh!' she said, pointing to a white heap in a further corner, 'Rhoda is asleep; she has been ill, and we have brought her here to nurse.' Then she went back in the same quick silence, brought a light from the table, and beckoning to him to follow her, led the way to the very darkest and shadiest end of the long drawing-room, where the ghosts had been flitting before them. There was a tall oak chair, in which she established herself. There was an old cabinet and a sofa, and a faded Italian shield of looking-glass, reflecting waves of brown and reddish light. Again Dolly motioned. Raban was to sit down there on the sofa opposite.

Since he had come into the house he had done little but obey the orders he had received. He was amused and not

a little mystified by this young heroine's silent imperious manners. He did not admire them, and yet he could not help watching her, half in wonder, half in admiration of her beauty. She, as I have said, did not think of speculating upon the impression she had created: she had other business on hand.

'I knew you at once,' said Dolly, with the hardihood of sixteen, 'when I saw you at the gate.' As she spoke in her girlish voice, somehow the mystery seemed dispelled, and Raban began to realise that this was only a drawing-room and a young lady after all.

'Ever since your letter came last year,' she continued, unabashed, 'I have hoped that you would come, and—and you have paid her the money she lent you, have you not?' said the girl, looking into his face doubtfully, and yet confidingly too.

Raban answered by an immense stare. He was a man almost foolishly fastidious and reserved. He was completely taken aback and shocked by her want of discretion—so he chose to consider it. Dolly, unused to the ways of the world, had not yet appreciated those refinements of delicacy with which people envelop the simplest facts of life.

As for Raban, he was at all times uncomfortably silent respecting himself. 'Dolly' conveyed no meaning whatever to his mind, although he might have guessed who she was. Even if Lady Sarah had not asked it of him, he would not have answered her. Whatever they may say, reserved people pique themselves upon some mental superiority in the reservations they make. Miss Vanborough misinterpreted the meaning of the young man's confused looks and silence.

He had not paid the money! she was sorry. Oh, how welcome it would have been for Aunt Sarah's sake and for George's sake! Poor George! how should she ever ask for money for him now? Her face fell; she tried to speak of other things to hide her disappointment. Now she wished she had not asked the question—it must be so uncom-

fortable for Mr. Raban she thought. She tried to talk on; one little sentence came jerking out after another, and Raban answered more or less stiffly. 'Was he not at Cambridge? Did he know her brother there—George Vanborough?'

Raban looked surprised, and said, 'Yes, he knew a Mr. Vanborough slightly. He had known him at his tutor's years before.' Here a vision of a stumpy young man flourishing a tankard rose before him. Could he be this beautiful girl's brother?

'Did he know her cousin, Robert Henley?' continued Dolly, eagerly.

Raban (who had long avoided Henley's companionship) answered even more stiffly that he did not see much of him. So the two talked on; but they had got into a wrong key, as people do at times, and they mutually jarred upon each other. Even their silence was inharmonious. Occasionally came a long, low, peaceful breath: it seemed floating on the warm shadows.

Everything was perfectly commonplace, and yet to Raban there seemed an element of strangeness and incongruity in the ways of the old house. There was something weird in the whole thing—the defiant girl, the sleeping woman, Lady Sarah, with her strange hesitations and emotions, and the darkness.—How differently events strike people from different points of view. Here was a commonplace half-hour, while old Sam prepared the seven-o'clock tea with Marker's help—while Rhoda slept a peaceful little sleep: to Raban it seemed a strange and puzzling experience, quite out of the common run of half-hours.

Did he dislike poor Dolly? That off-hand manner was not Frank Raban's ideal of womanliness. Lady Sarah, with her chilled silence and restrained emotions, was nearer to it by far, old and ugly though she was. And yet he could not forget Dolly's presence for a single instant. He found him-

self watching, and admiring, and speculating about her almost against his will. She, too, was aware of this silent scrutiny, and resented it. Dolly was more brusque and fierce and uncomfortable that evening than she had ever been in all her life before. Dorothea Vanborough was one of those people who reflect the atmosphere somehow, whose lights come and go, and whose brilliance comes and goes. Dull fogs would fall upon her sometimes, at others sunlight, moonlight, or faint reflected rays would beam upon her world. It was a wide one, and open to all the winds of heaven.

So Frank Raban discovered when it was too late. He admired her when he should have loved her. He judged her in secret when he should have trusted or blamed her openly. A day came when he felt he had forfeited all right even to help her or to protect her, and that, while he was still repenting for the past, he had fallen (as people sometimes do who walk backwards) into fresh pitfalls.

'My cousin Robert has asked me and Rhoda to spend a day at Cambridge in the spring,' said Dolly, reluctantly struggling on at conversation.

Frank Raban was wondering if Lady Sarah was never coming back.

There was a sigh, a movement from the distant corner.

'Did you call me?' said a faint, shrill voice, plaintive and tremulous, and a figure rose from the nest of soft shawls and came slowly forward, dispersing the many wraps that lay coiling on the floor.

'Have I been asleep? I thought Mr. Henley was here?' said the voice, confusedly.

Dolly turned towards her. 'No, he is not here, Rhoda. Sit down, don't stand; here is Mr. Raban come to see us.'

And then in the dim light of the fire and distant candle,

Raban saw two dark eyes looking out of a pale face that he seemed to remember.

'Mr. Raban!' said the voice.

'Have you forgotten?' said Dolly, hastily, going up to the distant sofa. 'Mr. Raban, from Paris ——' she began; then seeing he had followed her, she stopped; she turned very red. She did not want to pain him. And Raban, at the same moment, recognised the two girls he had seen once before, and remembered where it was that he had known the deep grey eyes, with their look of cold repulsion and dislike.

'Are you Mr. Raban?' repeated Rhoda, looking intently into his face. 'I should have known you if it had not been so dark.' And she instinctively put up her hand and clasped something hanging round her neck.

The young man was moved.

'I ought indeed to remember you,' he said, with some emotion.

And as he spoke, he saw a diamond flash in the firelight. This, then, was the child who had wandered down that terrible night, to whom he had given his poor wife's diamond cross.

Rhoda saw with some alarm that his eyes were fixed upon the cross.

'I sometimes think I ought to send this back to you,' she faltered on, blushing faintly, and still holding it tight-clasped in her hand.

'Keep it,' said Raban, gravely; 'no one has more right to it than you.' Then they were all silent.

Dolly wondered why Rhoda had a right to the cross, but she did not ask.

Raban turned still more hard and more sad as the old memories assailed him suddenly from every side. Here was the past living over again. Though he might have softened to Lady Sarah, he now hardened to himself; and, as it often

happens, the self-inflicted pain he felt seemed reflected in his manner towards the girls.

'I know you both now,' he said, gravely, standing up. 'Good-night; will you say good-by to your aunt for me?'

He did not offer to shake hands; it was Dolly who put out hers. He was very stiff, and yet there was a humble look in his pale face and dark eyes that Dolly could not forget. She seemed to remember it after he was gone.

Lady Sarah came in only a minute after Frank had left. She looked disappointed.

'I have just met him in the hall,' she said.

'Is he gone?' said Dolly. 'Aunt Sarah, he is still very unhappy.'

A few minutes afterwards Rhoda said what a pity that Mr. Raban was gone, when she saw how smartly the tea-table was set out, how the silver candlesticks were lighted, and some of the good old wine that George liked sparkling in the decanter. Dolly felt as if Mr. Raban was more disagreeable than ever for giving so much trouble for nothing. Rhoda was very much interested in Lady Sarah's visitor, and asked Dolly many more questions when they were alone upstairs. She had been ill, and was staying at Church House to get well in quiet and away from the schoolboys.

'Of course one can't ever like him,' Dolly said, 'but one is very sorry for him. Good-night, Rhoda.'

'No, I don't like her,' said Raban to himself; and he thought of Dolly all the way home. Her face haunted him. He dined at his club, and drove to the shabby station in Bishopsgate. He seemed to see her still as he waited for his train, stamping by the station fire, and by degrees that bitter vision of the past vanished away and the present remained. Dolly's face seemed to float along before him all the way back as the second-class carriage shook and jolted through the night, out beyond London fog into a region of

starlit plains and distant glimmering lights. Vision and visionary travelled on together, until at last the train slackened its thunder and stopped. A few late Cambridge lights shone in the distance. It was past midnight. When Raban, walking through the familiar byways, reached his college-gates, he found them closed and barred; one gas-lamp flared—a garish light of to-day shining on the ancient carved stones and mullions of the past. A sleepy porter let him in, and as he walked across the dark court he looked up and saw here and there a light burning in a window, and then some far-away college-clock clanged the half-hour, then another, and another, and then their own clock overhead, loud and stunning. He reached his own staircase at last and opened the oak door. Before going in, Raban looked up through the staircase-window at George Vanborough's rooms, which happened to be opposite his own. They were brilliantly illuminated, and the rays streamed out and lighted up many a deep lintel and sleeping-window.

CHAPTER XIII.

LITTLE BROTHER AND LITTLE SISTER.

Go; when the instinct is stilled, and when the deed is accomplished,
What thou hast done, and shalt do, shall be declared to thee then;
Go with the sun and the stars, and yet evermore in thy spirit
Say to thyself: 'It is good, yet is there better than it;
This that I see is not all, and this that I do is but little,
Nevertheless it is good, though there is better than it.'

—A. Clough.

As the actors pass across the stage of life and play their parts in its great drama, it is not difficult at the outset to docket them for the most part 'a lawyer,' 'a speculator,' 'an amiable person,' 'an intelligent, prosy man,' 'a parson,' &c.; but after watching the piece a little (on this all-the-world stage it is not the play that ends, but the actors and speculators that come and go), we begin to see, that although some of the performers may be suited to their parts, there are others whose characters are not so well cast to the piece—Robert Henley, for instance, who is not quite in his element as a very young man. But every one is in earnest in a certain fashion upon this life-stage, and that is why we find the actors presently beginning to play their own characters, instead of those which they are supposed to represent—to the great confusion, very often, of the drama itself. We have all read of a locksmith who had to act the part of a king; of a nephew who tried to wear his uncle's cocked hat; of a king who proclaimed himself a god; and

of the confusion that ensued; and it is the same in private as in public life, where people are set to work experiments in love, money, sermon, hay, or law-making, with more or less aptitude for the exercise—what a strange jumble it is! Here is the lawyer making love to his client, instead of writing her will; the lover playing on the piano while his mistress is expecting him; the farmer, while his crops are spoiling, pondering on the theory of original sin. Among women, too, we find wives, mothers, daughters, and even professed aunts and nieces, all with their parts reversed by the unkind freaks of fate. Some get on pretty well, some break down utterly. The higher natures, acting from a wider conception of life, will do their best to do justice to the character, uncongenial though it may be, which happens to be assigned to them. Perhaps they may flag now and then, specially towards the middle of the performance; but by degrees they come to hear the music of 'duty done.' And duty is music, though it may be a hard sort of fugue, and difficult to practise—one too hard, alas, for our poor George as yet to master. Henley, to be sure, accomplished his ambitions; but then it was only a one-fingered scale that he attempted.

Dolly's was easy music in those early days of her life: at home or in Old Street the girl herself and her surroundings were in a perfect harmony. Dolly's life was a melody played to an accompaniment of loving tones and tender words among the tranquil traditions of the old house and the old ivy-grown suburb in which it stood. Rhoda used to wonder why people cared so much for Dolly, who was so happy, who never sacrificed herself, but did as she liked, and won all hearts to her, even Robert Henley's, thought Rhoda, with a sigh. As for Dolly, she never thought about her happiness, though Rhoda did. The girl's life sped on peacefully among the people who loved her. She knew she

meant so well that it had not yet occurred to her that she might make mistakes in life and fail, and be sorry some day as other folks. Rhoda, comparing her own little back-garret life in the noisy Morgan household with her friend's, used to think that everybody and everything united to spoil her. Dolly was undoubtedly Dorothea Regina—ruler of the household—a benevolent tyrant. The province of the tea-pot was hers—the fortress of the store-room. She had her latch-key. Old Marker and George were the only people who ever ventured to oppose her. When they did so, Dolly gave in instantly with a smile and a sweet grace that was specially her own. She was a somewhat impetuous and self-diffident person in reality, though as yet she did not know what she was. In looks she could see a tall and stately maiden, with a sweet, round, sleepy face, reflected in the glass, and she took herself for granted at the loving valuation of those about her, as people, both old and young, are apt to do.

Dolly was one of those persons who travel on eagerly by starts, and then sit down to rest. Notwithstanding her impetuous, youthful manner, she was full of humility and diffidence, and often from very shyness and sincerity she would seem rude and indignant when she was half-frightened at her own vehemence; then came passionate self-reproach, how passionate none can tell but some of those who seem to have many selves and many impulses, all warring with one another. There are two great classes of women—those who minister, and those who are taken care of by others; and the born care-takers and workers are apt to chafe in early life, before people will recognise their right to do. Something is wrong, tempers go wrong, hearts beat passionately, boil over, ache for nothing at all; they want to comfort people, to live, to love, to come and go, to feel they are at work. It may

be wholesome discipline for such natures to live for years in a kingdom of education of shadows and rules. They may practise their self-denial on the keys of the piano, they may translate their hearts' interest into German exercises and back into English again; but that is poor work, and so far the upper classes pay a cruel penalty unknown to girls of a humbler birth. And so time goes on. For some a natural explanation comes to all their nameless difficulties. Others find one sooner or later, or the bright edge of impatient youth wears off. Raban once called Dolly a beautiful sour apple. Beautiful apples want time and sunshine to ripen and become sweet. If Dolly blamed others, she did not spare herself; but she was much beloved, and, as I have said, she meant so well that she could not help trusting in herself.

Something of Dolly's life was written in her face, in her clear, happy eyes, in her dark and troubled brow. Even as a girl, people used to say that she had always different faces, and so she had for the multitude; but for those who loved her it was always the same true, trusting look, more or less worn as time went on, but still the same. She had a peculiar, sudden, sweet smile, that went to the very heart of the lonely old aunt, who saw it often. Dolly never had the training of repression, and perhaps that is why, when it fell upon her in later life, the lesson seemed so hard. She was not brilliant. She could not *say* things as George did. She was not witty. Though she loved to be busy, and to accomplish, Dolly could not do things as Rhoda did—clearly, quickly, completely. But how many stupid people there are who have a touch of genius about them. It would be hard to say in what it consists. They may be dull, slow, cross at times, ill-informed, but you feel there is something that outweighs dulness, crossness, want of information.

Dorothy Vanborough had a little genius in her, though she was apt to look stupid and sulky and indifferent when she did not feel at her ease. Sometimes when reproved for this, she would stand gaping with her grey eyes, and looking so oddly like her Aunt Sarah that Mrs. Palmer, when she came home, would lose all patience with her. There was no knowing exactly what she was, her mother used to say. One day straight as an arrow—bright, determined; another day, grey and stiff, and almost ugly and high-shouldered. 'If Dolly had been more taking,' said Mrs. Palmer, judging by the light of her own two marriages, 'she might have allowed herself these quirks and fancies; but as it was, it was a pity.' Her mother declared that she did it on purpose.

Did she do it on purpose? In early life she didn't care a bit what people thought of her. In this she was a little unwomanly, perhaps, but unwomanly in the best and noblest sense. When with time those mysterious other selves came upon her that we meet as we travel along the road, bewildering her and pointing with all their different experiences, she ceased to judge either herself or others as severely; she loved faith and truth, and hated meanness and dissimulation as much as ever. Only, being a woman too honest to deceive herself, she found she could no longer apply the precepts that she had used once to her satisfaction. To hate the devil and all his works is one thing, but to say who is the devil and which are his works is another.

As for George Vanborough, his temper was alternately uproarious and melancholy: there was some incongruity in his nature that chafed and irritated him. He had abilities, but strange and cross-grained ones, of no use in an examination for instance. He could invent theories,

but somehow he never got at the facts; he was rapid in conclusion, too rapid for poor Dolly, who was expected to follow him wherever he went, and who was sometimes hard put to it, for, unlike George's, her convictions were slower than her sympathies.

A great many people seem to miss their vocations because their bodies do not happen to fit their souls. This is one of the advantages of middle age: people have got used to their bodies and to their faults; they know how to use them, to spare them, and they do not expect too much. George was at war with himself, poor fellow: by turns ascetic and self-indulgent, morbid, and over-confident. It is difficult to docket such a character, made up of all sorts of little bits collected from one and another ancestor; of materials warring against each other, as we have read in Mr. Darwin.

George's rooms at Cambridge were very small, and looked out across the green quadrangle at All Saints'. Among other instincts, he had inherited that of weaving his nest with photographs and old china, and lining it comfortably from Church House. There were papers and music-books, tankards (most of them with inscriptions), and a divining crystal. The old windows were deep and ivy-grown: at night they would often be cheerfully lighted up. 'Far too often,' say George's counsellors.

'I should like to entertain well enough,' says Henley, with a wave of the hand, 'but I can't afford it prudently. Bills have a knack of running up, particularly when they are not paid,' the young man remarks, with great originality, 'and then one can't always meet them.'

George only answers by a scowl from his little ferret eyes. 'You can pay your own bills twice over if you like,' he grunts out impatiently; 'mine don't concern you.'

Robert said no more; he had done his part, and he felt he

could now face Dolly and poor Lady Sarah of the bleeding purse with a clear conscience; but he could not help remembering with some satisfaction two neatly tied-up bundles of bills lying with a cheque-book in his despatch-box at home. He was just going when there came a knock at the door, and a pale man with a red beard walked in and shook hands with George, then somewhat hesitatingly with his companion, and finally sat down in George's three-sided chair.

Need I say that this was Raban, who had come to recommend a tutor to George? Was it to George or to Dorothea that Raban was so anxious to recommend a tutor?

George shrugged his shoulders, and did not seem in the least grateful.

Henley delayed a moment. 'I am glad you agree with me,' he said. 'I also have been speaking to my cousin on the subject.'

Raban bowed in the shy way peculiar to him. You never could tell if he was only shy or repelled by your advances.

'You and I have found the advantage of a good coach all our lives,' the other continued, with a subdued air of modest triumph. It seemed to say, 'You will be glad to know that I am one of the most rising men of the University;' and at the same time Robert looked down apologetically at poor scowling George, who was anything but rising, poor fellow, and well up to his knees in the slough of despond. Nor was it destined that Robert Henley was to be the man to pull him out. Although he had walked over from St. Thomas's to do so, he walked back again without having effected his purpose.

'I did not know, till your sister told me, that Mr. Henley was your cousin,' said Raban, as Robert left the room.

'Didn't you?' said George. 'I suppose you did not see any likeness in me to that grenadier with the cameo nose?' and turning his back abruptly upon Raban, he began

strumming Yankee-doodle on the piano, standing as he played, and putting in a quantity of pretty modulations. It was only to show off; but Raban might have been tempted to follow Henley downstairs if he had not caught sight of a photograph of a girl with circling eyes in some strange old-fashioned dress, with a lantern in her hand. It was the work of a well-known amateur, who has the gift of seizing expression as it flies, and giving you a breathing friend, instead of the image of an image. But it was in vain the young professor stayed on, in vain that he came time after time trying to make friends with young Vanborough and to urge him to work. He once went so far as to write a warning letter to Lady Sarah. It did no good, and only made Dolly angry. At Christmas, George wrote that he had not passed, and would be home on the 23rd. He did not add that he had been obliged to sign some bills before he could get away.

George came home; with or without his laurels, he was sure of an ovation. Dolly, by her extra loving welcome, only showed her disappointment at his want of success.

The fatted calf was killed, and the bottle of good wine was opened. 'Old Sam insisted on it,' said Lady Sarah, who had got into a way of taking shelter behind old Sam when she found herself relenting. It was impossible not to relent when Dolly, hearing the cab-wheels, came with a scream of delight flying down the staircase from George's room, where she had been busy making ready. A great gust of cold wind burst into the hall with the open door, by which George was standing, with his bag, a little fussy and a little shy; but Dolly's glad cry of welcome and loving arms were there to reassure him.

'Shut the door,' said Dolly, 'the wind will blow us away. Have you paid your cab?' As she spoke the horse was turning round upon its haunches, and the cab was driving off, and a pale face looked out for an instant.

'It's no matter,' said George, pushing to the door. 'Raban brought me. He is going on to dine somewhere near.'

'Horrid man!' said Dolly. 'Come, George, and see Aunt Sarah. She is in the drawing-room.'

Lady Sarah looked at George very gravely over her knitting, and her needles began to tremble a little.

'What do you wish me to say, George? That you failed because you couldn't or because you wouldn't try?'

'Some one must fail,' said George.

'It is not fair upon me,' said Lady Sarah, 'that you should be the one. No, Dolly, I am not at all unkind.'

I have said very little of the changes and economies that had been made at Church House, they affected Lady Sarah and Dolly so little; but when George came home, even in disgrace, a certain difference was made in the still ways of the house. Old Sam's niece, Eliza Twells, stayed all day, and was transformed into a smiling abigail, not a little pleased with her promotion. One of Lady Sarah's old grey gowns was bestowed upon her. A cap and ribbons were concocted by Dolly; the ribbons were for ever fluttering in and out of the sitting-room, and up and down the passages. There was a sound of voices now, a show of life. Dolly could not talk to herself all through the long months when George was away; but when she had him safe in his little room again the duet was unceasing.

Eliza Twells down below in the pan-decorated kitchen, in all the excitement of her new dignities, kept the ball going. You could hear old Sam's chuckles all the way upstairs, and the maiden's loud, croaking, cheerful voice.

'It's like a saw-mill,' said George, 'but what is that?'

'That is Eliza laughing,' said Dorothea, laughing herself; 'and there is dear old Marker scolding. Oh! George, how nice it is to have you home again; and then, as most happy

vibrations bring a sadder after-tone, Dolly sighed and stopped short.

'Disgrace *is* hard to bear,' said George moodily.

'Disgrace! What do you mean?' wondered Dolly, who had been thinking of something quite apart from those unlucky examinations—something that was not much, and yet she would have found it hard to put her thought into words. For how much there is that is not in words, that never happens quite, that is never realised altogether; and yet it is as much part of our life as anything else.

CHAPTER XIV.

RAG DOLLS.

> And slight Sir Robert, with his watery smile
> And educated whisker.

THESE were days not to be forgotten by Dolly or by her aunt. Don't we all know how life runs in certain grooves, following phases of one sort or another? how dreams of coming trouble haunt us vaguely all through a night? or, again, is it hope that dawns silently from afar to lighten our hearts and to make sweet visions for us before we awake to the heat of the day?

It was all tranquil progress from day to day. Raban came to see them once or twice while George was away. It seemed all peace and silence during those years in the old house, where the two women lived so quietly each their own life, thinking their own thoughts. Rumours came now and then of Mrs. Palmer's return; but this had been put off so often, from one reason or another, that Dolly had almost ceased to dwell upon it. She had settled down to her daily occupations. John Morgan had set her to work in one of his districts. She used to teach in the Sunday-school, help her aunt in a hundred ways. This eventful spring she went into Yorkshire with Marker and a couple of new gowns, on a visit to her uncle, Sir Thomas Henley, at Smokethwaite. She enjoyed herself extremely, and liked her uncle and the

girls very much. Her aunt was not very kind; 'at least, not so kind as I'm used to,' said Dolly afterwards. They had gone for long walks across the moors; they had ridden for twenty miles one day. She had seen her mother's picture, and slept in the room that used to be hers when she was a girl, and her cousin Norah had taken her about; but her Aunt Henley was certainly very cross and always saying uncomfortable things, and she was very glad to be home again, and didn't want to go away for years and years. Robert Henley had been there for a couple of days, and had come up to town with her. Jonah Henley was a very kind, stupid boy, not at all like Robert. He was very friendly to Dolly, and used to confide in her. He had made his mother very angry by insisting upon going into the Guards.

'She asked my advice,' said Dolly. 'She wanted to know if I didn't think it a foolish, idle sort of life.'

'And what did you say?' said Lady Sarah.

'I said that it might be so for some people who were clever and thoughtful, but that he seemed to have no interests at all, and never opened a book.'

'My dear child,' cried Lady Sarah, 'no wonder Lady Henley was annoyed!'

'Oh, dear me! I am so very sorry,' cries Dolly, penitently, as she walked along. They were going along one of the narrow alleys leading to the Square.

Day after day Lady Sarah used to leave home and trudge off with her basket and her well-known shabby cloak —it was warm and green like the heart that beat under it —from house to house, in and out, round and about the narrow little Kensington streets. The parents, who had tried to impose upon her at first, soon found that she had little sympathy for pathetic attitudes, and that her quick tongue paid them back in their own coin. They bore no malice. Poor

people only really respect those who know them as they are, and whose sympathy is personal and not ideal. Lady Sarah's was genuine sympathy; she knew her flock by name, and she spared no trouble to help those who were trying to help themselves. The children would come up shyly when they saw the straight, scant figure coming along, and look into her face. Sometimes the basket would open and red apples would come out—shining red apples in the dirty little back streets and by-lanes behind Kensington Square. Once Robert Henley, walking to Church House, across some back way, came upon his aunt sitting on an old chair on the step of a rag-shop with a little circle of children round her, and Dolly standing beside her, straight and upright. Over her head swung the legless form of a rag doll, twirling in the wind. On one side of the door was some rhymed doggerel about 'Come, cookey, come,' and bring 'your bones,' plastered up against the wall. Lady Sarah, on the step, seemed dispensing bounties from her bag to half-a-dozen little clamorous, half-fledged creatures.

'My dear Lady Sarah, what does this mean?' said Robert, trying to laugh, but looking very uncomfortable.

'I was so tired, Robert, I could not get home without resting,' said Lady Sarah, 'and Mr. Wilkins kindly brought me out a chair. These are some of my Sunday-school children, and Dolly and I were giving them a treat.'

'But really this is scarcely the place to —— If any one were to pass—if—— Run away, run away, run away,' said Mr. Henley affably to the children, who were all closing in a ragged phalanx and gazing admiringly at his trousers. 'I'll get you a cab directly,' said the young man, looking up and down. 'I came this short cut, but I had no idea ——'

'There are no cabs anywhere down here,' said Dolly, laughing. 'This is Aunt Sarah's district; that is her soup-kitchen.' And Dolly pointed up a dismal street with some

flapping washing-lines on one side. It looked all empty and deserted, except that two women were standing in the doorways of their queer old huddled-up houses. A little further off came a branch street, a blank wall, and some old Queen Anne railings and doorways leading into Kensington Square.

'Good-by, little Betty,' said Lady Sarah, getting up from her old straw chair, and smiling.

She was amused by the young man's unaffected dismay. Philanthropy was quite in Henley's line, but that was, Robert thought, a very different thing from familiarity.

'Now then, Betty, where's your curtsey?' says Dolly; 'and Mick, sir!'

Mick grinned, and pulled at one of his horrible little wisps of hair. The children seemed fascinated by the 'gentleman.' They were used to the ladies, and, in fact, accustomed to be very rude to Dolly, although she was so severe.

'If you will give me an arm, Robert,' said Lady Sarah, 'and if you are not ashamed to be seen with me——'

'My dear Lady Sarah!' said Robert, hastily, offering his arm.

'Now, children, be off,' says Dolly.

'Please, sir, won't you give us 'napeny?' said Mick, hopping along with his little deft, bare feet.

'Go away,—for shame, Mick!' cried Dolly again, while Henley impatiently threw some coppers into the road, after which all the children set off scrambling in an instant.

'Oh, Robert, you shouldn't have done that,' cried Dolly, rushing back to superintend the fair division of kicks and halfpence.

Robert waited for her for a moment, and looked at her as she stood in her long grey cloak, with a little struggling heap at her feet of legs and rags and squeaks and contortions. The old Queen Anne railings of the corner house, and the dim street winding into rags, made a background to

this picture of modern times: an old slatternly woman in a night-cap came to her help from one of the neighbouring doorways, and seizing one of the children out of the heap, gave it a cuff and dragged it away. Dolly had lifted Mick off the back of a smaller child—the crisis was over.

'Here she comes,' said Lady Sarah, in no way discomposed.

Robert was extremely discomposed. He hated to see Dolly among such sights and surroundings. He tried to speak calmly as they walked on, but his voice sounded a little cracked.

'Surely,' he said, 'this is too much for you at times. Do you go very often?'

'Nearly every day, Robert,' said Dorothea. 'You see what order I have got the children into.'

She was laughing again, and Henley, as usual, was serious.

'Of course I cannot judge,' said he, 'not knowing what state they were in originally.' Then he added, gravely turning to Lady Sarah, 'Don't you somehow think that Dolly is very young to be mixed up with a—rag-shops and wickedness?'

'Dolly is young,' said her aunt, not over pleased; 'but she is very prudent, and I am not afraid of her pawning her clothes and taking to drink.'

'My dear aunt, you don't suppose I ever thought of such a possibility,' Robert exclaimed. 'Only ladies do not always consider things from our point of view, and I feel in a certain degree responsible and bound to you as your nearest male protector (take care—here is a step). I should not like other people, who might not know Dolly as we do, to imagine that she was accustomed already to ——'

'My dear Robert,' said Lady Sarah, 'Dolly has got an aunt and a brother to take care of her; do you suppose that we would let her do anything that we thought might hurt

her in other people's opinion? Dolly, here is Robert horrified at the examples to which you are exposed. He feels he ought to interfere.'

'You won't understand me,' said Robert, keeping his temper very good-naturedly. 'Of course I can't help taking an interest in my relations.'

'Thank you, Robert,' said Dolly, smiling and blushing.

Their eyes met for an instant, and Robert looked better pleased. It was a bright delightful spring morning. All the windows were shining in the old square, there was a holiday thrill in the air, a sound of life, dogs barking, people stirring and coming out of their hiding-places, animals and birds exulting.

Dolly used to get almost tipsy upon sunshine. The weather is as much part of some people's lives as the minor events which happen to them. She walked along by the other two, diverging a little as they travelled along, the elder woman's bent figure beating time with quick fluttering footsteps to the young man's even stride. Dolly liked Robert to be nice to her aunt, and was not a little pleased when he approved of herself. She was a little afraid of him. She felt that beneath that calm manner there were many secrets that she had not yet fathomed. She knew how good he was, how he never got into debt. Ah me! how she wished George would take pattern by him. Dolly and Rhoda had sometimes talked Robert over. They gave him credit for great experience, a deep knowledge of the world (he dined out continually when he was in town), and they also gave him full credit for his handsome, thoughtful face, his tall commanding figure. You cannot but respect a man of six foot high.

So they reached the doorway at last. The ivy was all glistening in the sunshine, and as they rang the bell they heard the sound of Gumbo's bark in the garden, and then

came some music, some brilliant pianoforte-playing, which sounded clear and ringing as it overflowed the garden-wall and streamed out into the lane.

'Listen! Who can that be playing?' cries Dolly, brightening up still brighter, and listening with her face against the ivy.

'George,' says Robert. 'Has George come up again?'

'It's the overture to the *Freischütz*,' says Dolly, conclusively; 'it *is* George.'

And when old Sam shuffled up at last to open the door, he announced, grinning, that 'Mr. Garge had come, and was playing the peanner in the drawing-room.'

At the same moment, through the iron gate, they saw a figure advancing to meet them from the garden, with Gumbo caracolling in advance.

'Why there is Rhoda in the garden,' cries Dolly. 'Robert, you go to her. I must go to George.'

CHAPTER XV.

GEORGE'S TUNES.

. . Sing our fine songs that tell in artful phrase
The secrets of our lives, and plead and pray
For alms of memory with the after time.
—O. W. H.

THERE is George sitting at the old piano in the drawing-room. The window is wide open. The Venetian glass is dazzling over his head, of which the cauliflower shadow is thrown upon the wall. By daylight, the old damask paper looks all stained and discoloured, and the draperies hang fainting and turning grey and brown and to all sorts of strange autumnal hues in this bright spring sunshine.

The keys answer to George's vigorous fingers, while the shadow bobs in time from side to side. A pretty little pair of slim gloves and a prayer-book are lying on a chair by the piano; they are certainly not George's, nor Eliza Twells', who is ostensibly dusting the room, but who has stopped short to listen to the music. It has wandered from the *Freischütz* overture to *Kennst Du das Land?* which, for the moment, George imagines to be his own composition. How easily the chords fall into their places! how the melody flows loud and clear from his fingers! (It's not only on the piano that people play tunes which they imagine to be their own.) As for Eliza, she had never heard anything so beautiful in all her life.

'Can it play hymn toones, sir?' says she, in a hoarse voice.

Hymn tunes! George goes off into the Hundredth Psalm. The old piano shakes its cranky sides, the pedals groan and creak, the music echoes all round; then another shadow comes floating along the faded wall, two fair arms are round his neck, the music stops for an instant, and Eliza begins to rub up the leg of a table.

'How glad I am you have come; but *why* have you come, George—oughtn't you to be reading?'

'Oh,' says George, airily, 'I have only come for the day. Look here: have you ever heard this Russian tune? I've been playing it to Miss Parnell; I met her coming from church.'

'Miss Parnell? Do you mean Rhoda?' said Dolly, as she sits down in the big chair and takes up the gloves and the prayer-book, which opens wide, and a little bit of fresh-gathered ivy falls out. It is Rhoda's prayer-book, as Dolly knows. She puts back the ivy, while George goes on playing.

'How pretty!' says she, looking at him with her two admiring eyes, and raising her thick brows.

George, much pleased with the compliment, goes on strumming louder than ever.

'Robert is here,' says Dolly, still listening. 'He is in the garden with Rhoda.'

'Oh, is he?' says George, not over-pleased.

It was at this moment that Lady Sarah came to the garden-window, still in her district equipments. Eliza Twells, much confused by her mistress's appearance, begins to dust wildly.

'How d'ye do, George?' said his aunt, coming up to him. 'We didn't expect you so soon again.'

George offered his cheek to be kissed, and played a few chords with his left hand.

'I hadn't meant to come,' he said; 'but I was up at the station this morning, seeing a friend off, and as the train was starting I got in. I've got a return-ticket.'

'Of course you have,' said Lady Sarah, 'but where will you get a return-ticket for the time you are wasting? It is no use attempting to speak to you. Some day you will be sorry;' and then she turned away, and walked off in her gleaming goloshes, and went out at the window again. She did not join Robert and Rhoda, who were pacing round and round the garden walk, but wandered off her own way alone.

'There!' says George, looking up at Dolly for sympathy.

Dolly doesn't answer, but turns very pale, and her heart begins to beat.

'It is one persecution,' cries George, speaking for himself, since Dolly won't speak for him. 'She seems to think she has a right to insult me—that she has bought it with her hateful money.'

He began to crash out some defiant chords upon the piano.

'Don't, dear,' said Dolly, putting her hand on his. 'You don't know,' she said, hesitating, 'how bitterly disappointed Aunt Sarah has been when—when you have not passed. She is so clever herself. She is so proud of you. She hopes so much.'

'Nonsense,' said George, hunching up sulkily. 'Dolly, you are for ever humbugging. You love me, and perhaps others appreciate me a little; but not Aunt Sarah. She don't care that' (a crash) 'for me. She thinks that I can bear insult like Robert, or all the rest of them who are after her money-bags.'

He was working himself up more and more, as people do who are not sure they are right. He spoke so angrily that Dolly was frightened.

'Oh, George,' she said, 'how can you say such things; you mustn't, do you hear? not to me—not to yourself. Of course Robert scorns anything mean, as much as you do. Her savings! they all went in that horrid bank. She does not know where to go for money sometimes, and we ought to spare her, and never to forget what we do owe her. She denies herself every day for us. She will scarcely see a doctor when she is ill, or take a carriage when she is tired.'

Dolly's heart was beating very quick; she was determined that, come what might, George should hear the truth from her.

'If you are going to lecture me, too, I shall go,' said George; and he got up and walked away to the open window, and stood grimly looking out. He did not believe Dolly; he could not afford to believe her. He was in trouble; he wanted money himself. He had meant to confide in Dolly; that was one of the reasons why he had come up to town. He should say nothing to her now. She did not deserve his confidence; she did not understand him, and always sided with her aunt. 'Look here, I had better give the whole thing up at once,' he said, sulkily; 'I don't care to be the object of so many sacrifices.' As he stood there glowering, he was unconsciously watching the two figures crossing the garden and going towards the pond; one of them, the lady, turned, and seeing him at the window, waved a distant hand in greeting. George's face cleared. He would join Rhoda; it was no use staying here.

As he was leaving the room poor Dolly looked up from the arm-chair in which she had been sitting despondently: she had tears in her heart though her eyes were dry: she wanted to make friends. 'You know, George,' she said, 'I *must* say what I think true to you. Aunt Sarah grudges nothing ——'

'She makes the very most,' says George, stopping short,

'of what she does, and so do you;' and he looked away from Dolly's entreating face.

Again poor Dolly's indignation masters her prudence. 'How can you be so mean and ungrateful?' she says.

'Ungrateful!' cries George, in a passion; 'you get all you like out of Aunt Sarah; to me she doles out hard words and a miserable pittance, and you expect me to be grateful. I can see what Robert and Frank Raban think as well as if they said it.'

Dolly sprang past him and rushed out of the room in tears.

'Dolly! Dolly! forgive me, do forgive me! I'm a brute,' says George, running after her,—he had really talked on without knowing what he said—'please stop!'

'Dolly!' cries Lady Sarah from the breakfast-room.

Dolly went flying along the oak hall and up the old staircase and across the ivy window. She could not speak. She ran up to her room, and slammed the door, and burst out sobbing. She did not heed the voices calling then, but in after days, long, long after, she used to hear them at times, and how plainly they sounded, when all was silent—'Dolly, Dolly!' they called. People say that voices travel on through space,—they travel on through life, and across time,—is it not so? Years have passed since they may have been uttered, but do we not hear them again and again, and answer back longing into the past?

Meanwhile poor Dolly banged the door in indignation. She was glad George was sorry, but how dared he suspect her? How dared Mr. Raban—Mr. Raban, who did not pay his debts—What did she care?—What did they know? *They* did not understand how she loved her brother in her own way, her very own; loving him and taking care for him and fighting his battles. . . .

'Oh, George, how cruel you are,' sobbed poor Dolly, sitting on her window-sill. The warm sun was pouring

through the open casement, spreading the shadow of the panes and the framework upon the carpetless floor; in a corner of the window a little pot of mignonette stood ready to start to life; a bird came with the shadow of its little breast upon the bars, and chirruped a cheerful chirp. Dolly looked up, breathed in the sun and the bird-chirp, how could she help it? Then her wooden clock struck, it distracted her somehow, and her indignation abated; the girl got up, bathed her red eyes, and went to the glass to straighten her crisp locks and limp tucker. 'Who is knocking?—come in,' said Dolly. She did not look round, she was too busy struggling with her laces: presently she saw a face reflected in the glass beside her own, a pale brown face with black hair and slow, dark eyes, and close little red lips.

'Why, Rhoda, have you come for me?' said Dolly, looking round, sighing and soothed.

At the same time a voice from the garden below cried out, 'Dolly, come down! Have you forgiven me?'

'Yes, George,' said Dolly, looking out from her window.

'Here, let me help you,' cried Rhoda. 'Dolly, Mr. Robert and your brother sent me to find you.'

CHAPTER XVI.

A WALKING PARTY.

Not wholly in the busy world, nor quite
Beyond it blooms the garden that I love;
News from the teeming city comes to it,
In sound of funeral or marriage bells.

THE young people were starting for another walk that afternoon. Rhoda and Dolly were holding up their parasols and their white dresses out of the dust. They were half-way down the sunshiny lane when they met Frank Raban (of whom they had been speaking) coming to call at Church House.

'You had much better come along with us, Frank,' said George, who was always delighted to welcome his friends, however soon he might quarrel with them afterwards.

'I have an appointment at five o'clock,' said Raban, hesitating, and with a glance at Miss Vanborough, who was standing a little apart, and watching the people passing up and down the road.

'Five o'clock!' said George; 'five o'clock is ever so far away—on board a steamer, somewhere in the Indian Ocean; the passengers are looking over the ship's side at the porpoises. Where is your appointment?'

'Do you know a place called Nightingale Lane?' said Frank.

'I know Nightingale Lane; it is as good a place as any

other. Come, we will show you the way;' and, putting his arm through Frank's, George dragged him along.

'I wish George had not asked him,' said Robert, in a low voice. 'There were several things I wanted to consult you about, Dolly! but I must get a quiet half-hour. Not now, at some better opportunity.'

'Why, Robert!' said Dolly; 'what can you have to say that will take half-an-hour!' She was, however, much flattered that Robert should wish to consult her, and she walked along brightly.

It was a lovely spring afternoon: people were all out in the open air; the little Quaker children who lived in the house at the corner of the terrace were looking out of window with their prim little bonnets, and Dolly, who knew them, nodded gaily as she passed. She was quite happy again. Robert had looked at her so kindly. She was in charity with the whole world. She had scarcely had a word of explanation with George, but she had made it up with him in her heart. When he asked her for a second help of cold pie at luncheon, she took it as a sign of forgiveness. They went on now by the brown houses of Phillimore Terrace, until they reached a place where the bricks turn into green leaves, and branches arch overhead, and two long avenues lead from the ancient high road of the Trinobants all the way to the palatine heights of Campden Hill.

When they were in the avenue, the young people went and stood under the shade of a tree. George was leaning against the iron rail that separates the public walk from the park beyond. They were standing with their feet on the turf in a cris-cross of shadow, of twigs, and green blades sprouting between. Beyond the rail the lawns and fields sloped to where the old arcades and the many roofs and turrets of Holland House rose, with their weather-cocks veering upon the sky. Great trees were spreading their shadows upon the

grass. Some cows were trailing across the meadow, and from beyond the high walls came the echo of the streets without—a surging sound of voices and wheels, a rising tide of life, of countless feet beating upon the stones. Here, behind the walls, all was sweet and peaceful afternoon, and high overhead hung a pale daylight moon.

'Are not you glad to have seen this pretty view of the old house, Mr. Raban?' said Dolly to Frank, who happened to be standing next to her. 'Don't you like old houses?' she added, graciously, in her new-found amenity.

'I don't know,' said Frank. 'They are too much like coffins and full of dead men's bones. Modern lath and plaster has the great advantage of being easily swept away with its own generation. These poor old places seem to me all out of place among omnibuses and railway whistles.'

'The associations of Holland House must be very interesting,' said Robert.

'I hate associations,' said Frank, looking hard at Dolly. 'To-day is just as good as yesterday.'

Dolly looked surprised, then blushed up.

It is strange enough, after one revelation of a man or woman, to meet with another of the same person at some different time. The same person and not the same. The same voice and face, looking and saying such other things, to which we ourselves respond how differently. Here were Raban and Dolly, who had first met by a grave, now coming together in another world and state, with people laughing and talking; with motion, with festivity. Walking side by side through the early summer streets, where all seemed life, not death; hope and progress, not sorrow and retrospect—for Dolly's heart was full of the wonder of life and of the dazzling present. After that first meeting, she had begun to look upon the Raban of to-day as a new person altogether, a person who interested her, though she did not like him.

Even Dorothea in her softest moods seemed scarcely to thaw poor Frank. When he met her, his old, sad, desperate self used to rise like a phantom between them—no wonder he was cold, and silent, and abrupt. He could talk to others—to Rhoda, who wore his poor wife's shining cross, and had stood by her coffin, as he thought, and who now met him with looks of sympathy, and who seemed to have forgotten the past. To Miss Vanborough he rarely spoke; he barely answered her if she spoke to him; and yet I don't think there was a word or look of Dolly's that Raban ever forgot. All her poor little faults he remembered afterwards; her impatient ways, and imperious gestures, her hasty impulse and her innocent severity. What strange debtor and creditor account was this between them?

There are some people we only seem to love all the more because they belong to past sorrow. Perhaps it is that they are of the guild of those who are initiated into the sad secrets of life. Others bring back the pain without its consolation; and so Dolly, who was connected with the tragedy of poor Frank Raban's life, frightened him. When, as now, he thought he had seen a remembering look in her eyes, the whole unforgettable past would come before him with cruel vividness. She seemed to him like one of the avenging angels with the flaming swords, ready to strike. Little he knew her! The poor angel might lift the heavy sword, but it would be with a trembling hand. She might remember, but it was as a child remembers—with awe, but without judgment. The little girl he had known had pinned up her locks in great brown loops; her short skirts now fell in voluminous folds; she was a whole head taller, and nearly seventeen: but if the truth were told, I do not think that any other particular change had come to her, so peaceful had been her experience. Frank was far more changed. He had fought a hard fight with himself since that terrible day he had sat under

the arch in the twilight. He had conquered Peace in some degree, and now already he felt it was no longer peace that he wanted, but more trouble. Already, in his heart, he rebelled at the semi-claustration of the tranquil refuge he had found, where the ivy buttresses and scrolled iron gateways seemed to shut out wider horizons. But hitherto work was what he wanted, not liberty. He had made debts and difficulties for himself during that wild, foolish time at Paris! These very debts and difficulties were his best friends now, and kept him steady to his task. He accepted the yoke, thankful for an honest means of livelihood. He took the first chance that offered, and he put a shoulder to the old pulley at which he had tugged as a boy with a dream of something beyond, and at which he laboured as a man with some sense of duty done. He went on in a dogged, hopeless way from day to day. He is a man of little faith, and yet of tender heart.

Some one says that the world is a mirror that reflects the faces that we bring to the surface. Frank's scepticisms met him at every turn. He even judged his own ideal; and as he could not but think of Dolly every hour of the day, he doubted her unceasingly. There seemed scarcely a responsive chord left to him with which to vibrate to the song of those about him. Until he believed in himself again, he could not heartily believe in others.

Others, meanwhile, were happily not silent because of his reserve, and were chattering and laughing gaily. Rhoda was sitting on the shady corner of a bench, George was swinging his legs on the railing. Dolly did not sit down. She was not tired; she was in high spirits. By degrees, she seemed to absorb all her companion's life and brightness. So Raban thought as he glanced from Rhoda's pale face to Miss Vanborough's beaming countenance. Dolly's brown hair was waving in a pretty drift, her violet ribbons

seemed to make her grey eyes look violet. She had a long neck, a long chin; her white ample skirt almost hid Rhoda as she sat in her corner. The girl shifted gently from her seat, and slid away when Dolly—Dolly sobering down—began to tell some of Lady Sarah's stories of Holland House and its inmates.

'There was beautiful Lady Diana Rich,' said Dorothea, pointing with her gloved hand.

'Don't say Diana,' cries George; 'say Diāna.'

'She was walking in the Park,' continues his sister, unheeding the interruption, 'when she met a lady coming from behind a tree dressed, as she was herself, in a habit. Then she recognised herself,' Dolly said, slowly, opening her grey eyes; 'and she went home, and she died within a——'

Dolly, hearing a rustle, looked over her shoulder, and her sentence broke down. A white figure was coming from behind the great stem of the elm-tree, near which they were standing. In a moment, Dolly recovered herself, and began to laugh.

'Rhoda!' she said. 'I did not know you had moved. I thought you were my fetch.'

'No; I'm myself, and I don't like ghost stories,' said Rhoda, in her shrill voice. 'They frighten me so, though I don't believe a word of them. Do you, Mr. Raban?'

'Not believe!' cries George, putting himself in between Frank and Rhoda. 'Don't you believe in the White Lady of Holland House? She flits through the rooms once a year all in white satin, on the day of her husband's execution. They cut off his head in a silver nightcap, and she can't rest in her grave when she thinks of it.'

'Poor ghost!' said Dolly. 'I'm so sorry for ghosts. I sometimes think I know some live ones,' the girl added, looking at Frank unconsciously, and with more softness than he had believed her capable of.

'The first Lord Holland was a Rich,' said Henley, tapping with his cane upon the iron bars. 'He must have been the father of Lady Diana. He married a Cope. The Copes built the house, you know. I believe Aubrey de Vere was the original possessor of the property. It then passed to the monks of Abingdon.'

'What a fund of information!' said George, laughing. 'Raban is immensely impressed.'

Raban could not help smiling; but Dolly interposed. She saw that her cousin was only half pleased by the levity with which his remarks were received. 'What had Lord Holland done?' she asked.

'He betrayed everybody,' said Robert; 'first one side, then another. He earned his fate—he was utterly unreliable and inconsistent.'

'How can an honest man be anything else?' cried George, with his usual snort, rushing to battle. 'No honest men are consistent. Take Sir Robert Peel, take Oliver Cromwell. Lord Holland joined the Commonwealth, and then gave his head to save the King's. It was gloriously inconsistent.'

'For my part,' Robert answered, with some asperity, 'I must confess that I greatly dislike such impulsive characters. They are utterly unscrupulous.' . . .

'Some consciences might have been more scrupulously consistent than Lord Holland's, and kept their heads upon their shoulders,' said Raban, drily.

Dolly wondered what he meant, and whether he was serious. He spoke so shortly that she did not always understand him.

'I am sure I shall often change my mind,' she said, to her cousin.

'You are a woman, you know,' answered Henley, mollified by her sweet looks.

'And women need not trouble themselves about their motives?' said Frank, speaking in his most sententious way, and ignoring Henley altogether.

'Their motives don't concern anybody but themselves,' cried Dolly, rather offended by Frank's manner. He seemed to look upon her as some naughty child, to be constantly reproved and put down. Why did he dislike her? Dolly wondered. She couldn't understand anybody disliking her. Perhaps it says well for human nature, on the whole, that people are so surprised to find themselves odious to others.

Just then some church-bell began to ring for evening service. Five o'clock had come to Kensington, and George proposed that they should walk on with Raban to the house in Nightingale Lane.

'This way, Rhoda,' he said; 'are you tired? Take my arm.'

Rhoda, however, preferred tripping by Dolly's side.

A painter lived in the house to which Raban was going. It stood, as he said, in Nightingale Lane, within garden-walls. It looked like a farm-house, with its many tiles and chimneys, standing in the sweet old garden fringed with rose-bushes. There were poplar-trees and snowball-trees, and may-flowers in their season, and lilies-of-the-valley growing in the shade. The lawn was dappled with many shadows of sweet things. From the thatched porch you could hear the rural clucking of poultry and the lowing of cattle, and see the sloping roof of a farm-house beyond the elms. Henley did not want to come in; but Dolly and Rhoda had cried out that it was a dear old garden, and had come up to the very door, smiling and wilfully advancing as they looked about them.

The old house—we all know our way thither—has stood for many a year, and seen many a change, and sheltered many an honoured head. One can fancy Addison wandering in the lanes round about, and listening to the nightingale

'with a much better voice than Mrs. Tofts, and something of Italian manners in her diversions;' or Newton, an old man with faded blue eyes, passing by on his way from Pitt House, hard by. Gentle Mrs. Opie used to stay here, and ugly Wilkes to come striding up the lane in the days of Fox and Pitt and fiery periwigs. Into one of the old raftered rooms poor Lord Camelford was carried to die, when he fell in his fatal duel with Mr. Best in the meadows hard by. Perhaps Sir Joshua may have sometimes walked across from Holland House, five minutes off, where he was, a hundred years ago, painting two beautiful young ladies. Only yesterday I saw them; one leant from a window in the wall, the other stood without, holding a dove in her extended hand; a boy was by her side. Those ladies have left the window long since; but others, not less beautiful, still come up Nightingale Lane, to visit the Sir Joshua of our own time in his studios built against the hospitable house. My heroine comes perforce, and looks at the old gables and elm-trees, and stands under the rustic porch.

Robert was seriously distressed. 'Do come away,' said he; 'suppose some one were to see us.'

Rhoda, with a little laugh, ran down one of the garden-walks, and George went after her. Dolly stood leaning up against the doorway. She paid no attention to Robert's remonstrance, and was listening, with upraised eyes, to the bird up in the tree. Frank's hand was on the bell, when, as Robert predicted, the door suddenly opened wide. A servant, carrying papers and parcels, came out, followed by a lady in a flowing silk dress, with a lace hood upon her head, and by a stately-looking gentleman, in a long grey coat; erect, and with silver hair and a noble and benevolent head.

'Why is not the carriage come up?' said the lady to the servant, who set off immediately running with his parcels in his arms; then seeing Dolly, who was standing blushing

and confused by the open door, she said kindly, 'Have you come to see the studios?'

'No,' said Dolly, turning pinker still: 'it was only the garden, it looked so pretty; we came to the door with Mr. Raban.'

'I had an appointment with Mr. Royal,' said Raban, also shyly, 'and my friends kindly showed me the way.'

'Why don't you take your friends up to see the pictures?' said the gentleman. 'Go up all of you now that you are here.'

'My servant shall show you the way,' said the lady, with a smile, and as the servant came back, followed by a carriage, she gave him a few parting directions. Then the Councillor and the lady drove off to the India Office as hard as the horses could go.

It was a white-letter day with Dolly. She followed the servant up an oak passage, and by a long wall, where flying figures were painted. The servant opened a side door into a room with a great window, and my heroine found herself in better company than she had ever been in all her life before. Two visitors were already in the studio. One was a lady with a pale and gentle face—Dolly remembered it long afterwards when they met again—but just then she only thought of the pictures that were crowding upon the walls sumptuous and silent—the men and women of our day who seem already to belong to the future, as one looks at the solemn eyes watching from the canvas. Sweet women's faces lighted with some spiritual grace, poets, soldiers, rulers, and windbags, side by side, each telling their story in a well-known name. There were children too, smiling, and sketches, half done, growing from the canvas, and here and there a dream made into a vision, of Justice or of Oblivion. Of Silence, and lo! Titans from their everlasting hills lie watching the mists of life; or infinite Peace, behold, an

Angel of Death is waiting against a solemn disc. Dolly felt as though she had come with Christian to some mystical house along the way. For some minutes past she had been gazing at the solemn Angel—she was absorbed, she could not take her eyes away. She did not know that the painter had come in, and was standing near her.

'Do you know what that is?' said he, coming up to her.

'Yes,' answered Dolly in a low voice; 'I have only once seen death. I think this must be it; only it is not terrible, as I thought.'

'I did not mean to make it terrible,' the painter said, struck by her passing likeness to the face at which she was gazing so steadfastly.

Raban also noticed the gentle and powerful look, and in that moment he understood her better than he had ever done before; he felt as if a sudden ray of faith and love had fallen into his dark heart.

Before they left, Mr. Royal introduced Dolly to the two ladies who were in the studio. He had painted the head of one of them upon a little wooden panel that leant upon an easel by which the two ladies were standing. One of them spoke: 'How her children will prize your gift, Mr. Royal; it is not the likeness only, it is something more than likeness.'

'Life is short; one cannot do all things,' said the painter, quietly. 'I have tried not so much to imitate what I see as to paint people and things as I feel them, and as others appear to me to feel them.'

Dolly thought how many people he must have taught to feel, to see with their eyes, and to understand.

All the way home she was talking of the pictures.

'I saw a great many likenesses which were really admirable,' said Robert. 'I have met several of the people out at dinner.'

Rhoda could not say a single word about the pictures.

'Why, what were you about?' said Dolly, after she had mentioned two or three one after another. 'You don't seem to have looked at anything.'

'You didn't come into the back room, Dolly. I had an excellent cup of tea there,' said George; 'that kind lady had it sent up for us.'

CHAPTER XVII.

'INNER LIFE.'

The idea of a man's interviewing himself is rather odd to be sure. But then that is what we are all of us doing every day. I talk half the time to find out my own thoughts, as a schoolboy turns his pockets inside out to see what is in them.—O. W. HOLMES.

THE next time Raban came to town, he called again at Church House. Then he began to go to John Morgan's, whom he had known and neglected for years. He was specially kind to Rhoda and gentle in his manner when he spoke to her. Cassie, who had experience, used to joke her about her admirer. Not unfrequently Dolly would be in Old Street during that summer, and the deeply-interested recipient of the girls' confidences.

'Cassie, do you really mean that he has fallen in love with Rhoda?' said Dolly. 'Indeed he is not half good enough for her.' But all the same, the thought of his admiration for her friend somewhat softened Dolly's feelings towards Raban.

Rhoda herself was mysterious. One day she gave up wearing her diamond cross, and appeared instead with a pretty pearl locket. She would not say where she had got it. Zoe said it was like Cassie's. 'Had John given it to her?' Rhoda shook her head.

Dolly did not like it, and took Rhoda seriously to task. 'Rhoda, how silly to make a mystery about nothing!' Rhoda laughed.

Except for occasional troubles about George, things were going well at Church House that autumn. Raban sent a warning letter once, which made Dolly very angry. The Admiral talked of coming home in the following spring. Dolly's heart beat at the thought of her mother's return. But meanwhile she was very happy. Robert used to come not unfrequently. Rhoda liked coming when he was there; they would all go out when dinner was over, and sit upon the terrace and watch the sun setting calmly behind the medlar-tree and the old beech walk. Kensington has special tranquil hours of its own, happy jumbles of old bricks and sunset. The pigeons would come from next door with a whirr, and with round breasts shining in the light; the ivy-leaves stood out green and crisp; the birds went flying overhead and circling in their evening dance. Three together, then two, then a lonely one in pursuit.

Dolly stood watching them one evening, in the autumn of that year, while her aunt and Henley were talking. John Morgan, who had come to fetch Rhoda home, was discoursing, too, in cheerful tones, about the voice of nature I think it was. 'You do not make enough allowance for the voice of nature,' the curate was saying. 'You cannot blame a man because he is natural, because his impulse cries out against rules and restrictions.' As he spoke a bell in the ivy wall began to jangle from outside, and Dolly and Rhoda both looked up curiously, wondering who it could be.

'Rules are absolutely necessary restrictions,' said Henley, stirring his coffee; 'we are lost if we trust to our impulses. What are our bodies but concrete rules?'

'I wonder if it could be George?' interrupted Dolly.

'Oh, no,' said Rhoda, quickly, 'because ——' Then she stopped short.

'Because what, Rhoda?' said Lady Sarah, looking at her curiously. The girl blushed up, and seemed embarrassed,

and began pulling the ribbon and the cross round her neck. It had come out again the last few days.

'Have you heard anything of George?' Lady Sarah went on.

'How should I?' said Rhoda, looking up; then she turned a little pale, then she blushed again. 'Dolly, look,' she said, 'who is it?'

It was Mr. Raban, the giver of the diamond cross, who came walking up along the side-path, following old Sam. There was a little scrunching of chair-legs to welcome him. John Morgan shook him by the hand. Lady Sarah looked pleased.

'This was kind of you,' she said.

Raban looked shy. 'I am afraid you won't think so,' he said. 'I wanted a few minutes' conversation with you.'

Rhoda opened her wide brown eyes. Henley, who had said a stiff 'How-dy-do?' and wished to go on with the conversation, now addressed himself to Dolly.

'I always doubt the fact when people say that impulse is the voice of one's inner life. I consider that principle should be its real interpretation.'

Nobody exactly understood what he meant, nor did he himself, if the truth were to be told; but the sentence had occurred to him.

'An inner life,' said Dolly, presently, looking at the birds. 'I wonder what it means? I don't think I have got one.'

'No, Dolly,' said Lady Sarah, kindly, 'it is very often only another name for remorse. Not yet, my dear—that has not reached you yet.'

'An inner life,' repeated Rhoda, standing by. 'Doesn't it mean all those things you don't talk about—religion and principles?' she said, faltering a little, with a shy glance at Frank Raban. Henley had just finished his coffee, and heard

her approvingly. He was going again to enforce the remark, when Dolly, as usual, interrupted him.

'But there is *nothing* one doesn't talk about,' said the Dolly of those days, standing on the garden-step, with all her pretty loops of brown hair against the sun.

'I wish you would preach a sermon, Mr. Morgan, and tell people to take care of their outer lives,' said Lady Sarah, over her coffee-pot, 'and keep *them* in order while they have them, and leave their souls to take care of themselves. We have all read of the figs and the thistles. Let us cultivate figs; that is the best thing we can do.'

'Dear Aunt Sarah,' said Dolly prettily, and looking up suddenly, and blushing, 'here we all are sitting under your fig-tree.'

Dolly having given vent to her feelings suddenly blushed up. All their eyes seemed to be fixed upon her. What business had Mr. Raban to look at her so gravely?

'I wonder if the cocks and hens are gone to roost,' said my heroine, confused; and, jumping down from the step, she left the coffee-drinkers to finish their coffee.

Lady Sarah had no great taste for art or for *bric-à-brac.* Mr. Francis had been a collector, and from him she had inherited her blue china, but she did not care at all for it. She had one fancy, however,—a poultry fancy,—which harmlessly distracted many of her spare hours. With a cheerful cluck, a pluming, a spreading out of glistening feathers, a strutting and champing, Lady Sarah's cocks and hens used to awake betimes in the early morning. The cocks would chaunt matutinal hymns to the annoyance of the neighbourhood, while the hens clucked a cheerful accompaniment to the strains. The silver trumpets themselves would not have sounded pleasanter to Lady Sarah's ears than this crowing noise of her favourites. She had a little temple erected for this choir. It was a sort of pantheon, where all parts of the

world were represented, divided off by various latitudinal wires. There were crêve-cœurs from the Pyrenees, with their crimson crests and robes of black satin; there were magi from Persia, puffy, wind-blown, silent, and somewhat melancholy: there were Polish warriors, gallant and splendid, with an air of misfortune so courageously surmounted that fortune itself would have looked small beside it. Then came the Dorkings, feathery and speckly, with ample wings outstretched, clucking common-place English to one another.

To-night, however, the clarions were silent, the warriors were sleepy, the cocks and hens were settling themselves comfortably in quaint fluffy heaps upon their roosts, with their portable feather-beds shaken out, and their bills snugly tucked into the down.

Dolly was standing admiring their strength of mind, in retiring by broad daylight from the nice cheerful world, into the dismal darkened bed-chamber they occupied. As Dolly stood outside in the sunset, peeping into the dark roosting-place, she heard voices coming along the path, and Lady Sarah speaking in a very agitated voice.

'Cruel boy,' she said, 'what have I done, what have I left undone that he should treat me so ill?'

They were close to Dolly, who started away from the hen-house, and ran up to meet her aunt with a sudden movement.

'What is it? Why is he—— *Who* is cruel?' said Dolly, and she turned a quick, reproachful look upon Raban. What had he been saying?

'I meant to spare you, my dear,' said Lady Sarah, trembling very much, and putting her hand upon Dolly's shoulder. 'I have no good news for you; but sooner or later you must know it. Your brother has been behaving as badly as possible. He has put his name to some bills. Mr. Raban heard of it by chance. Wretched boy! he might be arrested. It is hard upon me, and cruel of George.'

They were standing near the hen-house still, and a hen woke up from her dreams with a sleepy cluck. Lady Sarah was speaking passionately and vehemently, as she did when she was excited; Raban was standing a little apart in the shadow.

Dolly listened with a hanging head. She could say nothing. It all seemed to choke her; she let her Aunt Sarah walk on—she stood quite still, thinking it over. Then came a gleam of hope. She felt as if Frank Raban must be answerable somehow for George's misdemeanours. Was it all true, she began to wonder. Mr. Raban, dismal man that he was, delighted in warnings and croakings. Then Dolly raised her head, and found that the dismal man had come back, and was standing beside her. He looked so humble and sorry that she felt he must be to blame.

'What have you been telling Aunt Sarah?' said Dolly, quite fiercely. 'Why have you made her so angry with my brother?'

'I am afraid it is your brother himself who has made her angry,' said Raban. 'I needn't tell you that I am very sorry,' he added, looking very pale; 'I would do anything I could to help him. I came back to talk to you about it now.

'I don't want to hear any more,' cried Dolly, with great emotion. 'Why do you come at all? What can I say to you, to ask you to spare my poor George? It only vexes *her*. You don't understand him—how should you?' Then melting, 'If you knew all his tenderness and cleverness?'—she looked up wistfully; for once she did not seem stern, but entreating; her eyes were full of tears as she gazed into his face. There was something of the expression that he had seen in the studio.

'It is because I do your brother full justice,' said Raban, gravely, looking at her fixedly, 'that I have cared to interfere.'

Dolly's eyes dilated, her mouth quivered. Why did she look at him like that? He could not bear it. With a sudden impulse—one of those which come to slow natures, one such as that which had wrecked his life before—he said in a low voice, 'Do you know that I would do anything in the world for you and yours?'

'No, I don't know it,' said Dolly. 'I know that you seem to disapprove of everything I say, and that you think the worst of my poor George; that you don't care for him a bit.'

'The worst!' Raban said. 'Ah! Miss Vanborough, do you think it so impossible to love those people of whose conduct you think the worst?'

She was beginning to speak. He would not let her go on. 'Won't you give me a right to interfere?' he said; and he took a step forward, and stood close up to her, with a pale, determined face. 'There are some past things which can never be forgotten, but a whole life may atone for them. Don't you think so?' and he put out his hand. Dolly did not in the least understand him, or what was in his mind.

'Nobody ever did any good by preaching and interfering,' cried the angry sister, ignoring the outstretched hand. 'How can *you*, of all people ——?' She stopped short; she felt that it was ungenerous to call up the past: but in George's behalf she could be mean, spiteful, unjust, if need be, to deliver him from this persecution,—so Dolly chose to call it.

She was almost startled by the deep cold tone of Frank's voice, as he answered, 'It is because I know what I am speaking of, Miss Vanborough, that I have an excuse for interfering before it is too late. You, at all events, who remember my past troubles, need not have reminded me of them.'

Heartless, cruel girl, she had not understood him. It was as well that she could not read his heart or guess how

cruelly she had wounded him. He would keep his secret henceforth. Who was he to love a beautiful, peerless woman, in her pride and the triumph of her unsullied youth. He looked once more at the sweet, angry face. No, she had not understood him; so much he could see in her clear eyes. A minute ago they had been full of tears. The tears were all dry now; the angel was gone!

So an event had occurred to Dolly of which she knew nothing. She was utterly unconscious as she came sadly back to the house in the twilight. The pigeons were gone to roost. Lady Sarah was sitting alone in the darkling room.

'What a strange man Mr. Raban is, and how oddly and unkindly he talks,' said Dolly, going to the chimney and striking a light.

'What did he say?' said Lady Sarah.

'I don't quite remember,' said Dolly; 'it was all so incoherent and angry. He said he would do anything for us, and that he could never forgive George.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN AUTUMN MORNING.

Fain would I but I dare not; I dare and yet I may not;
I may although I care not, for pleasure when I play not.
You laugh because you like not; I jest whenas I joy not
You pierce although you strike not; I strike and yet annoy not.
—THE SHEPHERD'S DESCRIPTION OF LOVE.

THE Palace clock takes up the echo of the Old Church steeple, the sun-dial is pointing with its hooked nose to the Roman figures on its copper face—eleven o'clock says the Palace clock. People go crossing and re-crossing the distant vistas of Kensington Gardens; the children are fluttering and scampering all over the brown turf, with its autumnal crop of sandwich-papers and orange-peel; governesses and their pupils are walking briskly up and down the flower-walk that skirts Hyde Park. There is a tempting glitter of horsemanship in the distance, and the little girls glance wistfully towards it, but the governesses for the most part keep their young charges to the iron railings and the varied selection of little wooden boards, with Latin names, that are sprouting all along the tangled flower-beds; the gravel paths are shaken over with fallen leaves, old, brown, purple—so they lie twinkling as the sun shines upon them.

One or two people are drinking at the little well among the trees where the children are at play.

'Hoy! hugh! houp!' cries little Betty, jumping high

into the air, and setting off, followed by a crew of small fluttering rags. What a crisp noise the dead leaves make as the children wade and splash and tumble through the heaps that the gardeners have swept together. The old place echoes with their jolly little voices. The children come, like the leaves themselves, and disport year after year in the sunshine, and the ducks in the round pond feed upon the crumbs which succeeding generations bring from their tables. There are some of us who still know the ducks of twenty years apart. Where is the gallant grey (goose) that once used to chase unhappy children flying agonized before him? Where is the little duck with the bright sparkling yellow eyes and the orange beak? Quick-witted, eager, unabashed, it used to carry off the spoils of the great grey goose itself, too busy careering upon the green and driving all before it, to notice the disappearance of its crusts, although the foolish floundering white ducks, placidly impatient in the pond, would lift up their canary noses and quack notes of warning. One would still be glad to know where human nature finishes and where ducks begin.

Overhead the sky lies in faint blue vaults crossed by misty autumnal streamers; the rooks sweep cawing and circling among the tree-tops; a bell is going quick and tinkling: it comes from the little chapel of the Palace hard by. The old royal bricks and windows look red and purple in the autumn sunlight, against gold and blue vapours, and with canopies of azure and grey.

All the people are coming and going their different ways this October morning. A slim girl, in black silk, is hurrying along from the wide door leading from the Palace Green. She stops for an instant to look at the shadow on the old sun-dial, and then hurries on again; and as she goes the brazen hour comes striking and sounding from across the house-roofs of the old suburb. A little boy, playing under

a tree, throws a chestnut at the girl as she hurries by. It falls to the ground, slipping along the folds of her black silk dress. At the same moment two young men, who have met by chance, are parting at the end of one of the long avenues. The girl, seeing them, stops short and turns back deliberately and walks as far as the old sun-dial before she retraces her steps.

How oddly all our comings and goings, and purposes and cross-purposes combine, fulfil, frustrate each other. It is like a wonderful symphony, of which every note is a human life. The chapel bell had just finished ringing, as Rhoda (for it is Rhoda) turned in through the narrow door leading to the garden, and John Morgan, with Dolly beside him, came quickly across the worn green space in front of the barracks.

'I'm glad I caught you up,' panted good old John, tumbling and flying after Dolly. 'So this is your birthday, and you are coming to church! I promised to take the duty for Mr. Thompson this morning. I have had two funerals on, and I couldn't get home before. We shall just do it. I'm afraid I'm going too quick for you?'

'Not at all,' said Dolly. I always go quick. I was running after Rhoda. She started to go, and then Aunt Sarah sent me after her. Do you know,' Dolly said, 'George, too, has become so very—I don't know what to call it ——? He asked me to go to church more often that day he came up.'

'Well,' said John, looking at her kindly, and yet a little troubled, 'for myself, I find there's nothing like it; but then I'm paid for it, you know: it is in my day's work. I hope George is keeping to his?'

'Oh, I hope so,' said Dolly, looking a little wistful.

'H'm,' says John, doubtfully; 'here we are. Go round to the left, where you see those people.' And he darts away and leaves her.

The clock began striking eleven slowly from the archway of the old Palace; some dozen people are assembled together in the little Palace chapel, and begin repeating the responses in measured tones. It is a quiet little place. The world rolls beyond it on its many chariot-wheels to busier haunts, along the great high-roads. As for the flesh and the devil, can they be those who are assembled here? They assemble to the sound of the bell, advancing feebly, for the most part skirting the sunny wall, past the sentry at his post, and along the outer courtyard of the Palace, where the windows are green and red with geranium-pots, where there is a tranquil glimmer of autumnal sunshine and a crowing of cocks. Then the little congregation turns in at a side-door of the Palace, and so through a vestibule, comes into the chapel, of which the bell has been tinkling for some week-day service: it stops short, and the service begins quite suddenly as a door opens in the wall, and a preacher, in a white surplice, comes out and begins in a deep voice almost before the last vibration of the bell has died away. As for the congregation, there is not much to note. There are some bent white heads, there is some placid middle-age, a little youth to brighten to the sunshine. The great square window admits a silenced light; there are high old-fashioned pews on either side of the place, and opposite the communion-table, high up over the heads of the congregation, a great square-curtained pew, with the royal arms and a curtained gallery. It was like Dugald Dalgetty's hiding-place, one member of the congregation thought. She used to wonder if he was not concealed behind the heavy curtains. This reader of the *Legend of Montrose* is standing alone in a big pew, with one elbow on the cushioned ledge, and her head resting on her hand. She has a soft brown scroll of hair, with a gleam of sunlight in it. She has soft oval cheeks that flush up easily, grey eyes, and black knotted eyebrows,

and a curious soft mouth, close fixed now, but it trembles at a word or a breath. She had come to meet her friend. But Rhoda, who is not very far off, goes flitting down the broad walk leading to the great summer-house. It used to stand there until a year or two ago, when the present generation carried it bodily away—a melancholy, stately, grandiose old pile, filling one with no little respect for the people who raised so stately a mausoleum to rest in for a moment. There was some one who had been resting there many moments on this particular morning: a sturdy young man, leaning back against the wall and smoking a cigar. He jumped up eagerly when he saw the girl at last, and, flinging his cigar away, came forward to meet her as she hurried from under the shade of the trees in which she had been keeping.

'At last, you unpunctual girl, he cried, meeting her and pulling her hand through his arm. 'Do you know how many cigars I have smoked while you have been keeping me waiting?'

She did not answer, but looked up at him with a long slow look.

'Dear George, I couldn't get away before; and when I came just now there was some one talking to you. Your aunt came, and Dolly, and they stayed, oh, such a time. I was so cross, and I kept thinking of my poor George waiting for me here.'

She could see George smiling and mollified as she spoke, and went on more gaily.

'At last, I slipped away; but I am afraid Dolly must have thought it so strange.'

'Dolly!' said George Vanborough, impatiently (for, of course, it was George, who had come up to town again with another return-ticket); 'she had better take care and not keep you from me again. Come and sit down,' said he. 'I have a thousand things to say to you. . . .'

'Oh George! it must only be for a moment,' said Rhoda, hesitating; 'if anybody were to——'

'Nonsense!' cried George, already agitated by the meeting, and exasperated by his long waiting; 'you are always thinking of what people will say; you have no feeling for a poor wretch who has been counting the minutes till he could see you again—who is going to the devil without you. Rhoda! I cannot stand this much longer—this waiting and starving on the crumbs that you vouchsafe to scatter from your table. What the deuce does it matter if they *don't* approve? Why won't you marry me this minute, and have done with it? There goes a parson with an umbrella. Shall I run after him and get him to splice us off-hand?'

Rhoda looked seriously alarmed. 'George, don't talk like this,' she said, putting her slim hand on his. 'You would never speak to me again if I consented to anything so dishonourable; Lady Sarah would never give you her living; she would never forg——'

'My aunt be hanged!' cried George, more and more excited. 'If she were ever so angry she could not divide us if we were married. I am not at all sure that I shall take her living. I only want to earn enough bread and butter for you, Rhoda. *Now*, I believe she might starve you into surrender. Rhoda, take me or leave me, but don't let us go on like this. A woman's idea of honour, I confess, passes my comprehension,' said he, somewhat bitterly.

'Can't you understand my not wanting to deceive them all?' Rhoda said.

'Deceive them all?' said George. 'What are we doing now? I don't like it. I don't understand it. I am ashamed to look Dolly in the face when she talks to me about you. Rhoda, be a reasonable, good, kind little Rhoda.' And the young fellow wrung the little hand he held in his, and

thumped the two hands both down together upon the seat.

He hurt her, but the girl did not wince. She again raised her dark eyes and looked fixedly into his face. When she looked like that she knew very well that George, for one —poor tamed monster that he was—could never defy her.

'Dearest George, you know that if I could, I would marry you this moment,' she said. 'But how can I ruin your whole future:—you, who are so sensitive and ill able to bear things? How could we tell Lady Sarah just now, when—when you have been so incautious and unfortunate——?'

'When I owe three hundred pounds!' cried George, at the pitch of his voice: 'and I must get it from my aunt one way or another—that is the plain English, Rhoda. Don't be afraid; nothing you say will hurt my feelings. If only,' he added, in a sweet changing voice—'if only you love me a little, and will help a poor prodigal out of the mire—— But no: you virtuous people pass on with your high-minded scruples, and leave us to our deserts,' he cried, with a sudden change of manner; and he started up and began walking up and down hastily in front of the summer-house.

The girl watched him for an instant—a hasty, stumpy figure going up and down, and up and down again.

'George! George!' faltered Rhoda, frightened—and her tears brimmed over unaffectedly—'haven't you any trust in my love? won't you believe me when I tell you, I—I—— you *know* I would give my life for you if I could!'

George Vanborough's own blue eyes were twinkling. 'Forgive me, darling,' he said, utterly melting in one instant, and speaking in that sweet voice peculiar to him. It seemed to come from his very heart. He sank down by her again. 'You are an angel—there, Rhoda—a thousand thousand miles away from me, though we are sitting side by side; but when you are unhappy, then I am punished for all my

transgressions,' said George, in his gentle voice. 'Now I will tell you what we will do: we will tell Dolly all about it, and she will help us.'

'Oh! not Dolly,' said Rhoda, imploring; 'George! everybody loves her, and she doesn't know what it means to be unhappy and anxious. Let us wait a little longer, George: we are happy now together, are we not? You must pass your examination, and take your degree, and it will be easier to tell them then. Come.'

'Come where?' said George.

'There are so many people here,' said Rhoda, 'you mustn't write to me again to meet you. You had much better come and see me at the house.'

'I will come and see you there, too,' said George. 'I met Raban just now. He will be telling them I am in town; he says my aunt wants to see me on business. Confound him!'

'Was that Mr. Raban?' said Rhoda, opening her eyes. 'Oh! I hope he will not tell them.' She led him across the grass, into a quiet place, deep among the trees, where they were safe enough; for where so many come and go, two figures, sitting on a felled trunk, on the slope of a leafy hollow, are scarcely noticed. The chestnuts fell now and then plash into the leaves and grasses, the breezes stirred the crisp leaves, the brown sunset of autumn glow tinted and swept to gold the changing world: there were still birds and blue overhead, a sea of gold all round them. George was happy. He forgot his debts, his dreams, the deaths and doubts and failures of life—everything except two dark eyes, a soft harmony of voice and look beside him.

'You are like Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words*, Rhoda,' said George.

Rhoda didn't answer.

'George, what o'clock is it?' she said.

CHAPTER XIX.

KENSINGTON PALACE CHAPEL.

An' I hallus comed to's choorch afoar moy Sally wur deäd,
An' eerd un a bummin' awaäy loike a buzzard clock ower my yeäd,
An' I niver knaw'd whot a meän'd, but I thowt a ad summut to saäy,
An' I thowt a said what a owt to 'a said an' I comed awaäy.

MEANWHILE Dolly, who has been looking for Rhoda in vain, stands alone in the pew, listening to the opening exhortation, and, at the same time, wondering alongside of it, as she used to do when she and Rhoda were little girls at Paris long ago. Her thoughts run somewhat in this fashion:—'Inner life,' thinks Dolly. 'What is inner life? George says he knows. John Morgan makes it all into the day's work and being tired. Aunt Sarah says it is repentance. Robert won't even listen to me when I speak of it. Have I got it? What am I?' Dolly wonders if she is sailing straight off to heaven at that moment in the big cushioned pew, or if the ground will open and swallow it up one day, like the tents of Korah and Abiram. This is what she is at that instant—so she thinks at least: Some whitewashed walls, a light through a big window; John Morgan's voice echoing in an odd melancholy way, and her own two hands lying on the cushion before her. Nothing more: she can go no farther at that minute towards 'the eternal fact upon which man may front the destinies and the immensities.'

So Dolly, at the outset of life, at the beginning of the longest five years of her life, stands in the strangers' great pew in Kensington Palace Chapel—a young Pharisee, perhaps, but an honest one, speculating upon the future, making broad her phylacteries; and with these, strange flashes of self-realisation that came to puzzle her all her life long—standing opposite the great prayer-books, with all the faded golden stamps of lions and unicorns. It was to please her brother George that Dolly had come to church this Saint's Day. What wouldn't she have done to please him? Through all his curious excursions of feeling he expected her always to follow, and Dolly tried to follow as she was expected.

'For our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of life,' the reader ran on. Dolly was ready enough to be grateful for all these mercies, only she thought that out of doors, in the gardens, she would have felt as grateful as she did now; and she again wondered why it was better to tender thanks in a mahogany box with red stuffings, out of a book, instead of out of her heart, in the open air. 'Can this be because I have no inner life?' thought Dolly, with her vacant eyes fixed on the clergyman. A bird's shadow flitted across the sun-gleam on the floor. Dolly looked up and saw the branch of the tree through the great window, and the blue depths shining, dazzling, and dominant. Then the girl pushed her hand across her eyes, and tried to forget other thoughts as she stood reading out of the big brown prayer-book. Dolly's gloves had fallen over the side of the pew, and were lying in the oak-matted passage-place, at the feet of a little country cookmaid from one of the kitchens of the Palace, who alternately stared down at the grey gloves and up at the young lady. The little cook, whose mistress was away, had wandered in to the sound of the bell, and sat there with her rosy cheeks, like some russet apple

that had fallen by chance into a faded reliquary belonging to a sumptuous shrine. Was it because it was Saturday, Dolly wondered, that she could not bring her heart to the altar?—that the little chapel did not seem to her much more than an allegory? Are royal chapels only echoes and allegories? Do people go there to pray real prayers, to long passionately, with beating hearts? Have dried-up tears ever fallen upon the big pages of the old books with their curling *t*'s and florid *s*'s? Books in whose pages King George the Third still rules over a shadowy realm, Queen Charlotte heads the Royal Family!

Dolly had started away from her vague excursions when the Epistle ended. 'Of the tribe of Zabulon twelve thousand, of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand.' . . . It seemed to Dolly but a part of the state and the ceremony that oppressed her. As the armies passed before her, she seemed to hear the chaunt of the multitude, to follow the endless processions of the elect filing past with the seals on their triumphant brows, the white robes and palms in their extended hands!

But listen, what is this? John Morgan thundered out the long lists of the tribes; but his voice softened as he came to the well-loved gospel of the day:—'Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom: blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; blessed are the merciful, the pure, the peacemakers. . . .'

'Are these the real tribes upon earth for whom the blessing is kept? Am I of the tribe of the merciful, of the peacemakers?' Dolly asked herself again. 'How can I make peace?—there is no one angry,' thought the girl; 'and I'm sure no one has ever done me any harm to be forgiven, except—except Mr. Raban, when he spoke to Aunt Sarah so cruelly about George. Ought I to forgive that?' thought

the sister, and yet she wished she had not spoken so unkindly. . . .

When the end came there was a rustle. The old ladies got up off their knees, the curtains stirred in the big Dugald Dalgetty pew: Dolly was to meet John Morgan in the outer room, but the old clerk gave her a message to say that Mr. Morgan had gone to the chaplain's, and would meet her in the clock court of the Palace.

'There was a gentleman asking for him just a minute by,' said the old clerk.

So Dolly, instead of filing off with the rest of the congregation, went sweeping along the dark vaulted passages with the sunlight at either end—a grey maiden floating in the shade.

Dolly's dress was demure enough: for though she liked bright colours, by some odd scruples she denied herself the tints she liked. If she sometimes wore a rose or a blue ribbon, it was Lady Sarah who bought them, and who had learnt of late to like roses and blue ribbons by proxy. Otherwise, she let Dolly come, go, dress as she liked best; and so the girl bought herself cheap grey gowns and economical brown petticoats: luckily she could not paint her pretty cheeks brown, nor her bright hair grey. Sometimes Rhoda had proposed that they should dress in black with frill caps and crosses, but this Aunt Sarah peremptorily refused to permit. Lady Sarah was a clever woman, with a horror of attitudinising, and some want of artistic feeling. The poor people whom she visited, Rhoda herself, soon discovered the futility of any of the little performances they sometimes attempted for Lady Sarah's benefit.

Dolly stepped out from the dark passage into the Palace courtyard, with its dim rows of windows, its sentinel, its brasses shining, the old doorways standing at prim intervals with knobs and iron bells, which may be pulled to-day, but

which seem to echo a hundred years ago, as they ring across the Dutch court. The little cookmaid was peeping out of her kitchen-door, and gave a kind little smile. Some one else was waiting, pacing up and down that quiet place, where footsteps can be heard echoing in the stillness. But as Dolly advanced, she discovered that it was not John Morgan, as she imagined. The gentleman, who had reached the end of his walk, now turned, came towards her, looking absently to the right and the left. It was the very last person in the whole world she had expected or wished to see. It was Frank Raban, with his pale face, who stopped short when he saw her. They had not met since that day when he had talked so strangely.

If Dolly looked as if she was a little sorry to see Mr. Raban, Mr. Raban also looked as if he had rather not have met Dolly. He gave a glance round, but there was no way by which he could avoid her, unless he was prepared, like harlequin in the pantomime, to take a summersault and disappear through one of the many windows. There was no help for it. They both came forward.

'How do you do, Miss Vanborough?' said Raban, gravely, holding out his hand, and thinking of the last time they had met.

'How do you do?' said Dolly, coldly, just giving him her fingers. Then melting a little, as people do who have been over-stiff—'Have you seen George lately? how is he?' said Dolly, more forgivingly.

Raban looked surprised. 'He is quite well . . . Don't you—has he not——' he interrupted himself, and then he went on, looking a little confused: 'I am only in town for an hour or two. I have been calling at John Morgan's, and they sent me here to find him. Shall I find Lady Sarah at home this afternoon?'

Dolly flushed up. In a moment all her coldness was gone.

Something in his manner made her suspect that all was not well. 'It is something more about George?' she said, frightened, and she fixed her two circling eyes upon the man. Why was he for ever coming—evil messenger of ill tidings? She guessed it, she felt it, she seemed to have some second sight as regards Raban. She almost hated him. A minute ago she had thought she could forgive him.

Dolly's cheeks flushed in vain, her eyes flashed harmless lightning.

'Yes, it is about your brother,' said the young man, looking away. 'I have at last been able to make that arrangement to help him, as Lady Sarah wished. It has taken me some time and some trouble;' and without another word he turned and walked away towards the passage.

I think this was the first time Dolly had ever been snubbed in all her life, except by George, and that did not count.

A furtive, quick, yet hesitating footstep flutters after Frank. 'Mr. Raban,' says Miss Vanborough.

He stopped.

'I did not mean to pain you,' blushing up (she was very indignant still, and half-inclined to cry. But she was in the wrong, and bent upon apology). 'I beg your pardon,' she said, in a lofty, condoning, half-ashamed, half-indignant sort of way; and she held out her hand.

Frank Raban did not refuse the outstretched hand; he took it in his, and held it tight for an instant, with a grip of which he was scarcely aware, and then he dropped it. 'You don't know,' he said, with some emotion,—'I hope you will never know, what it is to have done another great wrong. I cannot forget what you said to me that last evening we met; but you must learn more charity, and believe that even those who have failed once may mean to do right another time.'

How little she guessed that, as he spoke, he was thinking what a madness had been his; wondering what infatuation

had made him, even for one instant, dream they could ever be anything to one another.

As the two made it up, after a fashion, a bell tinkled through the court, a door opened, and John Morgan came running down some worn steps, twirling his umbrella like a mill.

'Here I am, Dolly. Why, Raban!' he shouts, 'where do you come from? Dr. Thompson is better—he kept me discussing the church-rates. I couldn't get away. You see, where the proportion of Dissenters —— Will you have an arm?'

'No, thank you,' said Dolly.

'——where the proportion is one-fiftieth of the population ——'

The curate, always enthusiastic, seized Raban's arm, and plunged with him into the very depths of Dr. Thompson's argument. Dolly lingered behind for a minute, and came after them, along the passage again and out by a different way into an old avenue which leads from the Palace stables, and by a garden enclosed in high brick walls. It used to be Lady Henley's garden, and Dolly sometimes walked there. Now she only skirted the wall. The sun was casting long shadows, the mists were gone, a sort of sweet balmy ripeness was in the air, as they came out upon the green. The windows of the old guard-house were twinkling; some soldiers were lounging on the grass. Some members of the congregation were opening the wicket-gates of one of the old houses that stood round about in those days, modest dependencies of the Palace, quaint-roofed, with slanting bricks and tiles, and narrow panes, from whence autumnal avenues could be descried.

There is a side-door leading from Palace Green to Kensington Gardens. Within the door stands an old stone summer-house, which is generally brimming over with little

children, who for many years past have sat swinging their legs upon the seat.

As Dolly passed the gate she heard a shout, and out of the summer-house darted a little ragged procession, with tatters flying—Mikey and his sister, who had spied their victim, and now pursued her with triumphant cries.

'Tsus!—hi, Mikey!—Miss Vamper!' (so they called her).

'Give us a 'napeny,' says Mikey. 'Father's got no work, mother was buried on Toosdy! We's so 'ungry.'

'Why, Betty,' said Dolly, stopping short, and greatly shocked, 'is this true?'

'Ess,' says little Betty, grinning, and running back through the wicket.

'What did you have for dinner yesterday?' says Dolly, incredulous, and pursuing Betty towards the summer-house.

'Please, Miss, mother give us some bread-and-drippin',' says Mikey, with a caper. 'I mean father did.. We's so . . .'

'You mean that you have been telling me a wicked story,' interrupted Dolly. 'I am *very* angry, Mikey. I *never* forgive deception. I shall give you no apples—nothing. I . . . .' She stopped short; her voice suddenly faltered. She stood quite still watching two people, who came advancing down the avenue that led to the little door, arm-in-arm, and so absorbed in each other, that for a minute they did not see that she was standing in the way. It was a chance. If it had not happened then, it would have happened at some other time and place.

Rhoda had waited until the service was over, and in so doing she had come upon the last person whom she wished to see just then. There stood Dolly by the summer-house, with a pale face, confronting her, with the little ragged crew about her knees. Mikey, looking up, thought that for once 'Miss Vamper' was in the tantrums.

Rhoda started back instinctively, meeting two blank wondering eyes, and would have pulled George away, but it was too late.

'Nonsense,' said George; and he came forward, and then they all were quite silent for a minute, George a little in advance, Rhoda lingering still.

'What does this mean?' said Dolly, coldly, speaking at last.

'What does it mean!' George burst out. 'Don't you see us? don't you guess? It is good news, isn't it?—Dolly, she loves me. Have you not guessed it all along—ever since—months ago?'

He was half-distracted, half-excited, half-laughing. His eyes were dim with moisture. Any one might see him. What did he care for the ragged children, the people passing by—those silent crowds that flit through our lives! He came up to Dolly.

'You will be tender to her, won't you, and help her, for my sake, and you will be our friend, Dolly? We had not meant to tell you yet; but you wish us joy, won't you, dear?'

'Tender to her? Help her? What help could she want?' thought Dolly, looking at Rhoda, who stood silent still, but who made a little dumb movement of entreaty. 'Was it George who was asking her to befriend him? Was it George, who had mistrusted her all this long time, and kept her in ignorance . . .?'

'Why don't you answer? Why do you look like that? Do you wonder that I or that anybody else should love her?' he went on eagerly.

'What do you want me to do?' Dolly asked. 'I cannot understand it.'

Her voice sounded hard and constrained: she was hurt and bewildered.

George was bitterly disappointed. Her coldness shocked

him. Could it be possible that Rhoda was right and Dolly hard and unfeeling?

Poor Dolly! A bitter wave of feeling seemed suddenly to rise from her heart and choke her as she stood there. So! there was an understanding between them? Did he come to see Rhoda in secret, while she was counting the days till they should meet? Was it only by chance that she was to learn their engagement? They had been stopping up the way; as they moved a little aside to let the people pass, Rhoda timidly laid one hand on Dolly's arm,—'Won't you forgive me? won't you keep our secret?' she said.

'Why should there be any secret?' cried Dolly, haughtily. 'How could I keep one from Aunt Sarah? I am not used to such manœuvrings.'

Rhoda began to cry. George, exasperated by Dolly's manner, burst out with 'Tell her, then! Tell them all—tell them everything! Tell them of my debts! Part us!' he said. 'You will make your profit by it, no doubt, and Rhoda, poor child, will be sacrificed.' He felt he was wrong, but this made him only the more bitter. He turned away from Dolly, and pulled Rhoda's hand through his arm.

'I will take care of you, darling,' he said.

'George! George!' from poor Dolly, sick and chilled.

'Dolly!' cried another voice from without the gate. It was John Morgan's. He had missed her, and was retracing his steps to find her.

Poor weak-minded Dolly! now brought to the trial and found wanting: how could she withstand those she loved? All her life long it was so with her. As George turned away from her, her heart went after him.

'Oh, George! don't look at me so. My profit! You have made it impossible for me to speak,' she faltered, as she moved away to meet the curate and Frank Raban.

'What is the matter? are you ill?' said John Morgan,

meeting Dorothea in the doorway. 'Why did you wait behind?'

'Mikey detained me. I am quite well, thank you,' said Dolly, slowly, with a changed face.

Raban gave her a curious look. He had seen some one disappear into the summer-house, and he thought he recognised the stumpy figure.

John Morgan noticed nothing; he walked on, talking of the serious aspect things were taking in the East—of Doctor Thompson's gout—of the church-rates. Frank Raban looked at Dolly once or twice, and slackened his steps to hers. They left her at the corner of her lane.

CHAPTER XX.

RHODA TO DOLLY.

Make denials,
Increase your services: so seem as if
You were inspired to do those duties which
You tender to her. . . .
—CYMBELINE.

DOLLY heard the luncheon-bell ringing as she walked slowly homewards. It seemed to her as if she had been hearing a story which had been told her before, with words that she remembered now, though she had listened once without attaching any meaning to them. Now she seemed to awake and understand it all—a hundred little things, unnoticed at the time, crowded back into her mind and seemed to lead up to this moment. Dolly suddenly remembered Rhoda's odd knowledge of George's doings, her blushes, his constant comings of late: she remembered everything, even to the gloves lying by the piano. The girl was bitterly hurt, wounded, impatient. Love had never entered into her calculations, except as a joke or a far-away impossibility. It was no such very terrible secret after all that a young man and a young woman should have taken a fancy to each other; but Dolly, whose faults were the faults of inexperience and youthful dominion and confidence, blamed passionately as she would have sympathised. Then in a breath she blamed herself.

How often it happens that people meaning well, as Dolly did, undoubtedly slide into some wrong groove from the overbalance of some one or other quality. Dolly cared too much and not too little, and that was what made her so harsh to George, and then, as if to atone for her harshness, too yielding to his wish—to Rhoda's wish working by so powerful a lever.

Lady Sarah came home late for luncheon, and went up to her room soon after. Dolly gave Frank Raban's message. She herself stopped at home all day expecting George, but no George came, not even Rhoda, whom she both longed and hated to see again. Every one seemed changed to Dolly; she felt as if she was wandering lost in the familiar rooms, as if George and her aunt and Rhoda were all different people since the morning.

'Why are you looking at me, child?' said Lady Sarah, suddenly. Dolly had been wistfully scanning the familiar lines of the well-known face; there was now a secret between them, thought the girl.

Mr. Raban came in the afternoon, as he had announced, and Dolly, going into the oak room, found him there, standing in the shadow, with a bundle of papers under his arm, and looking more like a lawyer's clerk than a friend who had been working hard in their service.

Dolly was leaving the room again, when her aunt called her back for a minute.

'Did George tell you anything of his difficulties the last time he was in town?' Lady Sarah asked from her chimney-corner. 'When was it you saw him, Dolly?' She was nervously tying some papers together that slipped out of her hands and fell upon the floor.

Poor Dolly turned away. There was a minute's silence.

Dolly flushed crimson. 'I—I don't—I can't tell you,' she said, confusedly.

She saw Frank Raban's look of surprise as she turned.

What did she care what he thought of her? What was it to him if she chose to tell a lie and he guessed it? Oh, George! cruel boy! what had he asked?

Frank Raban wondered at Dolly's silence. Since she wished to keep a secret, he did not choose to interfere; but he blamed her for that, as for most other things; and yet the more he blamed her the more her face haunted him. Those girl's eyes, with their great lights and clouds; that sweet face, that looked so stern and yet so tender too. When he was away from her he loved her; when he was with her he accused her.

It was a long, endless day. Miss Moineaux was welcome at tea-time, with her flannel bindings and fluttering gossip. It seemed like a little bit of commonplace, familiar every-day coming in. Dolly went to the door with her when she left them, and saw black trees swaying, winds chasing across the dreary sky, light clouds sailing by. The winds rose that night, beating about the house. A chimney-pot fell crashing to the ground; elm-branches broke off from the trees and were scattered along the parks. Dolly, in her little room, lay listening to the sobs and moans without, to the fierce hands beating and struggling with her window. She fell into a sleep, in which it seemed to her that she was railing and raving at George again: she awoke with a start to find that it was the wind. She dreamt the history of the day over and over. She dreamt of Raban, and somehow he always looked at her reproachfully. She awoke very early in the morning, long before it was time to get up, with penitent, loving words on her lips. Had she been harsh to George? Jealous—was she jealous? Dolly scorned to be jealous, she told herself. It was her hatred of wrong, her sense of justice, that had made her heart so bitter. Poor Dolly had yet to discover how far she fell short of her own ideal. My poor little heroine was as yet on the eve of her

long and lonely expedition in life. There might be arid places waiting for her, dreary passes, but there were also cool waters and green pastures along the road. Nor had she yet journeyed from their shade, and from the sound of her companions' voices and the shelter of their protection.

This was Rhoda's explanation. She was standing before Dolly, looking prettier than ever. She held a flower in her hand, which she had offered her friend, who silently rejected it. Rhoda had looked for Dolly in vain in the house. She found her at last, disconsolately throwing crumbs to the fishes in the pond. Dolly stood sulky and miserable, scarcely looking up when Rhoda spoke. They were safe in the garden out of reach of the quiet old guardians of the house. Rhoda began at once.

'He urged it,' said Rhoda, fixing her great dark eyes steadily upon Dolly, 'indeed he did. I said no at first; I would not even let him be bound. One day I was weak and consented to be engaged. I sinned against my own conscience; I am chastised.'

'Sinned?' said Dolly, impatiently; 'chastised? Rhoda, Rhoda, you use long words that mean nothing. Oh! why did you not tell Aunt Sarah from the beginning? She loves George so dearly—so dearly that she would have done anything, consented to everything, and this wretchedness would have been spared. How shall I tell her? How shall I ever tell her? I can't keep such a secret. Already I have had to tell a lie.'

'I could not bear to be the means of injuring him,' Rhoda said, flushing up. 'I daresay you won't understand me or believe me, but it is true. Indeed, indeed, it is true, Dolly. Lady Sarah would never forgive him now if he were to marry me. She does not like me. Dolly, you know it. I have been culpably foolish; but I will not damage his future.'

'Of course it is foolish to be engaged,' said Dolly; 'but there are worse things, Rhoda, a thousand times.'

'Yes,' said Rhoda. 'Dolly, you don't know half. He has been gambling—dear, foolish boy—borrowing money from the Jews. Uncle John heard of it through a pupil of his. He wrote to Mr. Raban. Oh, Dolly, I love him so dearly, that it breaks my heart. How can I trust him? How can I? Oh, how difficult it is to be good, and to know what one should do.'

Rhoda flung herself down upon the wooden bench as she spoke, leaning her head against the low brick wall, with its ivy sprays. Dolly stood beside her, erect, indignant, half softened by the girl's passion, and half hardened when she thought of the deception that she had kept up. Beyond the low ivy wall was the lane of which I have spoken, where some people were strolling; overhead the sky was burning deep, the afternoon shadows came trembling and shimmering into the pond. Lady Sarah had had a screen of creepers put up to shelter her favourite seat from the winds; the great leaves were still hanging to the trellis, gold and brown.

'If I thought only of myself should I not have told everybody?' said Rhoda, excitedly, and she clasped her hands; 'but I feel there is a higher duty to him. I will be his good angel and urge him to work. I will leave him if I stand in his way, and keep to him if it is for good. Do you think I want to be a cause of trouble between him and Lady Sarah? She might disinherit him. It is you she cares for, and not poor George; I heard Mr. Raban say so only yesterday,' cried Rhoda, in a sudden burst of tears. 'He told me so.'

Dolly waited for a moment, and then slowly turned away, leaving Rhoda still sobbing against the bricks. She couldn't forgive her at that instant; her heart was bitter

against her. What had she done to deserve such taunts? Why had Rhoda come making dissension and unhappiness between them? It was hard, oh, it was hard. There came a jangling burst of music from the church bells, as if to add to her bewilderment.

'Dear Rhoda,' said Dolly, coming back, and melting suddenly, 'do listen to me. Tell them all. I cannot see one reason against it.'

'Except that we are no longer engaged,' said Rhoda, gravely. 'I have set him free, Dolly; that is what I wanted to tell you. I wrote to him, and set him free; for anything underhand is as painful to me as to you. It was only to please George I consented. Hush! They are calling me.'

Engaged or not, poor Dorothea felt that all pleasure in her friend's company was gone; there was a tacit jar between them — a little rift. Dolly for the first time watched Rhoda with critical eyes, as she walked away down the path that led to the house, fresh and trim in her pretty dress, and her black silk mantlet, and with her flower in her hand. Dolly did not follow her. She thought over every single little bit of her life after Rhoda had left her, as she sat there alone, curled up on the wooden seat, with her limp violet dress in crumpled folds, and her brown hair falling loose, with pretty little twirls and wavings. Her grey eyes were somewhat sad and dim from the day's emotion. No, she must not tell her aunt what had happened until she had George's leave. She would see him soon; she would beg his pardon; she would *make* him tell Aunt Sarah. She had been too hasty. She had spoken harshly, only it was difficult not to be harsh to Rhoda, who was so cold—who seemed as if she would not understand. All she said sounded so good, and yet, somehow, it did not come right. Then she began to wonder if it could be that Rhoda loved George

more than Dolly imagined. Some new glimmer had come to the girl of late—not of what love was, but of what it might be. Only Dolly was fresh and prim and shy, as girls are, and she put the thought far away from her. Love! Love was up in the stars, she thought hastily. All the same she could not bring herself to feel cordially to Rhoda. There was something miserably uncomfortable in the new relations between them; and Dolly showed it in her manner plainly enough.

Lady Sarah told Dolly that afternoon that she had written to George to come up at the end of the week. 'He has had no pity on us, Dolly,' she said. 'I have some money that a friend paid back, and with that and the price of a field at Bartlemere, I shall be able to pay for his pastimes during the last year.

'Aunt Sarah,' said Dolly suddenly illuminated, 'can't you take some of my money; do, please, dearest Aunt Sarah.'

'What would be the use of that?' said Lady Sarah. 'I want the interest for your expenses, Dolly.' She spoke quite sharply, as if in pain, and she put her hand to her side and went away. If Lady Sarah had not been ill herself and preoccupied, she might have felt that something also ailed Dolly, that the girl was constrained at times, and unlike herself. Dolly only wondered that her aunt did not guess what was passing before her, so patent did it seem, now that she had the key.

One day Marker persuaded her mistress to go to a doctor. Lady Sarah came back with one of those impossible prescriptions that people give. Avoid all anxiety; do not trouble yourself about anything; live generously; distract yourself when you can do so without fatigue.

Lady Sarah came home to find a Cambridge letter on the table, containing some old bills of George's, which a tradesman had sent on to her; a fresh call from the unlucky

bank in which Mr. Francis had invested so much of her money: an appeal from Mikey's fever-stricken cellar, and a foreign scented letter, that troubled her more than all the rest together:—

Trincomalee, September 25, 18—.

DEAREST SARAH,—I have many and many a time begun to write to you, only to destroy bitter records of those sorrows which I must continue to bear *alone*. Soon we shall be leaving this ill-fated shore, where I have passed so many miserable years gazing with longing eyes at the broad expanse lying so calm and indifferent before me.

Before long Admiral Palmer sails for England. He gives up his command with great reluctance, and returns *viâ* the Cape; but I, in my weak state of health, dare risk no longer delay. Friends—kind, good friends, Mrs. and Miss M'Grudder—have offered to accompany me overland, sharing all expenses, and visiting Venice and Titian's—the great master's glorious works—*en route*, to say nothing of Raphael, and Angelo the divine. We shall rest a week at Paris. I feel that after so long a journey utter prostration will succeed to the excitement which carries me through where I see others, more robust than myself, failing on every side. And then I am in rags—a study for Murillo himself! I cannot come among you all until my wardrobe is replenished. How I look forward to the time when I shall welcome my Dorothea—ours, I may say—for you have been all but a mother to her. On my return I trust to find some corner to make my nest; and for that purpose I should wish to spend a week or two in London, so as to be within easy reach of all. Sarah, my first husband's sister, will you help me; for the love of 'auld lang syne,' will you spare a little corner in your dear old house? Expensive hotels I cannot afford. My dear friends here agree that Admiral Palmer's ungraciously-given allowances are beggarly and unworthy of his high position. How differently dear Stan would have wished him to act! Silver and gold have I none—barely sufficient for my own dress. Those insurances were most unfairly given against the widow and the orphan. Tell my darlings this; tell them, too, that all that I have is theirs. When I think that for the last six years, ever since my second marriage, a tyrant will has prevented me from folding them to my heart, indignation nearly overcomes the prudence so foreign to my nature. Once more, fond love to you, to my boy, and to *ma fille;* and trusting before long to be once more at home,

Ever your very affectionate

PHILIPPA.

P.S.—Since writing the above few lines, I find that my husband wishes to compass my death. He again proposes my returning with him by the Cape. Sarah, will you spare me the corner of a garret beneath your roof?

The letter was scented with some faint delicious perfume.

'Here, take it away,' says Lady Sarah. 'Faugh! Of course she knows very well that she can have the best bedroom, and the dressing-room for her maid; and you, my poor Dolly, will have a little amusement and some one better fitted to——'

'Don't,' cries Dolly, jumping forward with a kiss.

CHAPTER XXI.

CINDERS.

'Mid the wreck of IS and WAS,
Things incomplete and purposes betrayed
Make sadder transits o'er thought's optic glass
Than noblest objects utterly decayed!

DOLLY went to afternoon church the day George was expected. When she came home she heard that her brother was upstairs, and she hurried along the passage with a quick-beating heart, and knocked at his door. It was dark in the passage, and Dolly stood listening—a frightened, grey-eyed, pent-up indignation, in a black dress, with her bonnet in her hand. There was a dense cloud of smoke and tobacco in the room when Dolly turned the lock at last, and she could only cough and blink her eyes. As the fumes cleared away, she saw that George was sitting by the low wooden fireplace. He had been burning papers. How eagerly the flames leaped and travelled on, in bright blue and golden tongues, while the papers fell away black and crackling and changing to cinder. Dolly looked very pale and unlike herself. George turned with a bright haggard sort of smile.

'Is that you, Dolly?' he said. 'Come in; the illumination is over. You don't mind the smell of tobacco. I have been burning a box of cigars that Robert gave me. He knows no more about cigars than you do.'

'Oh, George,' cried Dolly. 'Is this all you have to say, after making us so unhappy——?'

'What do you want me to say?' said George, shrugging his shoulders.

'I want you to say that you have told her everything, and that there are no more concealments,' Dolly cried, getting angry. 'When Aunt Sarah asked me about you last I felt as if it was written in my face that I was lying.'

He was going to answer roughly, but he looked up at Dolly's pale agitated face, and was sorry for her. He spoke both kindly and crossly.

'Don't make such a talk, Dolly, and a fuss. We have had it out—John Morgan—council of state—she has been—she has been—'—his voice faltered a little bit—'a great deal kinder than I deserve or had any reason to expect, judging by *you*, Dolly. It's not *your* business to scold, you know.'

'And she knows all,' said Dolly, eagerly and brightening.

'She knows all about my debts,' said George, expressively. 'She is going to let me try once more for the next scholarship. She shan't be disappointed this time. However, the past is past, and can't be helped. I've been burning a whole drawer full of it . . .' And he struck his foot into the smouldering heap.

People think that what is destroyed is over, forgetting that what has been is never over, and that it is in vain you burn and scatter the cinders of many a past hope and failure, and of a debt to pay, a promise broken. Debts, promises, failures are there still. There were the poems George had tried to write, the account-books he had not filled up, the lists of books he had not read, a dozen mementoes of good intentions broken.

'And did you not tell Aunt Sarah about Rhoda?' repeated Dolly, disappointed. 'Oh, George, what does Rhoda mean when she says you are no longer engaged? What does it all mean?'

'It means, it means,' said George, impatiently, 'that I am an idiot, but I am not a sneak; and if a woman trusts me, I can keep her counsel, so long as you don't betray me, Dolly. Only there are some things one can't do, not even for the woman one loves.' Then he looked up suddenly, and seeing Dolly's pained face, he went on: 'Dolly, I think you would cut off your head if I were to ask you for it: Rhoda won't snip off one little lock of hair. Poor dear, she is frightened at every shadow. She has given me back this,' he said, opening his hand, which he had kept closed before, and showing Dolly a little pearl locket lying in his palm. Then he went on in a low voice, looking into the fire, 'I love her enough, God knows, and I would tell the whole world, if she would let me. But she says no—always no; and I can trust her, Dolly, for she is nearer heaven than I am. It is her will to be silent,' he said, gently; 'angels vanish if we would look into their faces too closely. She would like me to have a tranquil spirit, such as her own; she thinks me a thousand times better than I am,' said George, 'and if I did as she wishes, I could be happy enough, but not contented.' Dolly wondered of what he was thinking, as he went on pacing up and down the room. 'I cannot tell lies to myself, not even for her sake. I cannot take this living as she wishes. If I may not believe in God my own way, I should blaspheme and deny Him, while I confessed Him in some one else's words. You asked me one day if I had an inner life, Dolly,' George said, coming back to the oak chimney-piece again. 'Inner life is only one's self and the responsibility of this one life to the Truth. Sometimes I think that before I loved Rhoda I was not all myself, and though the truth was the same it did not concern me in the same degree, and I meant to do this or that as it might be most advisable. Now, through loving her, Dolly, I seem to have come to something beyond us both, and what is

advisable don't seem to matter any more. Can you understand this?'

'Yes, George,' said Dolly, looking at him earnestly—his sallow face had flushed up, his closed eyes had opened out. Dolly suddenly flung her arms round his neck and kissed him. She felt proud of her brother as she listened to him. She had come to blame, she remained to bless him. Ah, if every one knew him as well as she did. She was happier than she had been for many a day, and ready to believe that George could not be wrong. She could not even say no that evening after dinner, when George proposed that they should go over to the Morgans'.

'Go, my dears,' said Lady Sarah; and Dolly got up with a sort of sigh to get her bonnet. Just as they were starting, her cousin Robert walked in unexpectedly, and proposed to accompany them. He had come in with a serious face, prepared to sympathise in their family troubles, and to add a few words in season, if desired, for George's benefit. He found the young man looking most provokingly cheerful and at home, Lady Sarah smiling, and if Dolly was depressed she did not show it, for, in truth, her heart was greatly lightened. The three walked off together.

'We shall not be back to tea,' said Robert, who always liked to settle things beforehand. But on this occasion Mrs. Morgan's hospitable teapot was empty for once. The whole party had gone off to a lecture and dissolving views in the Town Hall. The only person left behind was Tom Morgan, who was sitting in the study reading a novel, with his heels on the chimney-piece, when they looked in.

'Good-night, Tom,' said Dolly, with more frankness than necessary; 'we won't stay, since there is only you.'

'Good-evening,' said Robert, affably. And they came out into the street again. He went on: 'I am sorry John Morgan was not at home. I want him to fix some time for

coming down to Cambridge. You must come with him, Dolly. I think it might amuse you.'

'Oh, thank you,' says Dolly, delighted.

This prospect alone would have been enough to make her walk back enjoyable, even if George had not been by her side; if it had not been so lovely a night; if stars had not burnt sweet and clear overhead; if soft winds had not been stirring. The place looked transformed, gables and corners standing out in sudden lights. They could see the dim shade of the old church, and a clear green planet flashing with lambent streams beyond the square tower. Then they escaped from the crowd and turned down by the quiet lane where Church House was standing gabled against the great Orion. They found the door ajar when they reached the ivy gate; the hall door, too, was wide open, and there seemed to be boxes and some confusion.

'Oh, don't let us go in; come into the garden,' said Dolly, running to the little iron garden-gate inside the outer wall. There was a strange glimmer behind the gate against which the slim white figure was pushing. The garden was dark, and rustling with a trembling in the branches. A great moon had come up, and was hanging over London, serenely silvering the housetops and spires; its light was rippling down the straight walks of which the gravel was glittering.

'Yes, come,' said George, and the three young people flitted along to their usual haunt by the pond.

'What is that?' said Dolly, pointing in the darkness; 'didn't somebody go by?' She was only a girl in her teens, and still afraid of unseen things.

'A rat,' cried George, dashing forward.

'Oh, stop,' from Dolly.

'Don't be a goose,' said Robert; and as he spoke George met them, flourishing an old garden shawl of Lady Sarah's,

which had been forgotten upon the bench. He flung it weirdly down upon the gravel walk. '"Dead for a ducat, dead,"' said he. Then he started forward with a strange moonlight gleam upon his face. '"This counsellor is now most still, most secret, and most grave,"' he said, '"who was in life a foolish prating knave."' His voice thrilled, he got more and more excited.

Robert began to laugh: 'What is that you are acting?' he said.

'Acting?' cried George, opening his eyes; '"that skull had a tongue in it and could sing once." "Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' the earth ——?"'

'Do be quiet,' said Henley, impatiently. 'Is not some one calling?'

Some one was calling: lights were appearing and disappearing; the drawing-room window was wide open, and their aunt stood on the terrace making signs, and looking out for them.

'Look, there goes a falling star,' said George.

'Ah! who is that under the tree?' cried Dolly again, with a little shriek. 'I knew I had seen some one move;' and as she spoke, a figure emerging from the gloom came nearer and nearer to them, almost runnin with two extended arms; a figure in long flowing garments, silver in the moonlight, a woman advancing quicker and quicker.

'Children, children!' said a voice. 'It is I,—George—your mother! Don't you know me—darlings? I have come. I was looking for you. Yes, it is I, your mother, children.'

Dolly's heart stood still, and then began to throb, as the lady flung her arms round Robert, who happened to be standing nearest.

'Is this George? I should have known him anywhere,' she cried.

Was this their mother? this beautiful, sweet, unseen woman, this pathetic voice?

Dolly had seized George's hand in her agitation, and was crunching it in hers. Robert had managed to extricate himself from the poor lady's agitated clutch.

'Here is George. I am Robert Henley,' he said. 'But, my dear aunt, why—why did you not write? I should have met you. I——'

It was all a strange confusion of moonlight, and bewilderment, and of tears, presently, for Mrs. Palmer began to cry and then to laugh, and finally went off into hysterics in her son's arms.

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. PALMER.

Le Baron—'Je vais m'enfermer pour m'abandonner à ma douleur. Dites-lui, s'il me demande, que je suis enfermé et que je m'abandonne à ma douleur . . '

—A. De Musset.

When they were a little calmed down, when they had left the moon and the stars outside in the garden, and were all standing in a group in the drawing-room round the chair in which Mrs. Palmer had been placed, Dolly saw her mother's face at last. She vaguely remembered her out of the long ago, a very young and beautiful face smiling at her: this face was rounder and fuller than the picture, but more familiar than her remembrance. Mrs. Palmer was a stout and graceful woman, with a sort of undulating motion peculiar to her, and with looks and ways some of which Dolly recognised, though she had forgotten them before. There was a strong likeness to Dolly herself, and even a little bit of George's look when he was pleased, though poor George's thick complexion and snub nose were far, far removed from any likeness to that fair and delicate countenance. Dolly gazed admiringly at the soft white hand, with the great Louis-Quinze ring upon the forefinger. Though Mrs. Palmer had come off a journey in semi-hysterics, she was beautifully dressed in a black silk dress, all over rippling waved flounces, that flowed to her feet. She was leaning

back in the chair, with half-closed eyes, but with a tender, contented smile.

'I knew you would take me in,' she said to Lady Sarah. 'I felt I was coming home—to my dear sister's home. See,' she said, 'what dear Stan gave me for my wedding-gift. I chose it at Lambert's myself. We spared no expense. I have never taken off his dear ring;' and she put out her soft hand and took hold of Lady Sarah's mitten. 'Oh, Sarah, to think—to think——'

Lady Sarah shrunk back as usual, though she answered not unkindly: 'Not now, Philippa,' she said, hastily. 'Of course this house is your home, and always open to you; at least, when we know you are coming. Why did you not write? There is no bed ready. I have had the maids called up. If Admiral Palmer had let me know——'

'He did not know,' said Mrs. Palmer, getting agitated. 'I will tell you all. Oh, Dolly, my darling, beware how you marry; promise me——'

'He did not know?' interrupted Lady Sarah.

Dolly's mother got more and more excited.

'I had some one to take care of me,' she said. 'My old friend Colonel Witherington was on board, and I told him everything as we were coming along. I telegraphed to you, did I not? But my poor head fails me. Oh, Sarah, exile is a cruel thing; and now, how do I know that I have not come home too soon?' she said, bursting into tears. 'If you knew all——'

'You shall tell us all about it in the morning, when you are rested,' said Lady Sarah, with a glance at Robert.

'Yes, in the morning, yes,' said Mrs. Palmer, looking relieved, and getting up from her chair, and wiping her eyes. 'How good you are to me! Am I to have my old room where I used to stay as a girl? Oh, Sarah, to think of my longings being realised at last, and my darling children—dear Stan's

children—there actually before me.' And the poor thing, with a natural emotion, once more caught first one, then the other, to her, and sat holding her son's hand in both hers. When he tried to take it away she burst into fresh tears; and, as a last resource, Marker was summoned.

Poor Mrs. Palmer! her surprise had been something of a failure; George was not expansive, nor used to having his hand held: the boy and girl were shy, stiff, taken aback. Aunt Sarah was kind, but cross and bewildered: Mrs. Palmer herself exhausted after twelve hours' railway journey, and vaguely disappointed.

'It was just like her,' said Lady Sarah, wearily, to Marker, as they were going upstairs some two hours later, after seeing Mrs. Palmer safe into her room, and bolting the doors, and putting out the lights of this eventful evening. 'What can have brought her in this way?'

Marker looked at her mistress with her smiling round face. 'The wonder to me was whatever kept her away so long from those sweet children, to say nothing of you, my lady.'

'She has chosen to make other ties,' said Lady Sarah; 'her whole duty is to her husband. Good-night, Marker: I do not want you to-night.'

'Of course you know best, my lady,' says Marker doubtfully. 'Good-night, my lady.'

And then all was quite silent in the old house. The mice peeped out of their little holes and sniffed at the cheese-trap; a vast company of black beetles emerged from secret places and corners; the clocks began to tick like mad. Dolly lay awake a long time, and then dreamt of her new mamma, and of the moonlight that evening, and of a floating sea. Mrs. Palmer slept placidly between her linen sheets. Sarah Francis lay awake half the night crying her eyes and her aching heart away in bitter tears. Philippa was come. She

knew of old what her advent meant. She loved Philippa, but with reserve and pain; and now she would claim her Dolly, she would win her away, and steal her treasure from her again—what chance had she, sad and sorry and silent, with no means of uttering her love? She was a foolish, jealous woman; she knew it, and with all her true heart she prayed for strength and for love to overcome jealousy and loneliness. Once in her life her difficult nature had caused misery so great between her and her husband that the breach had never been repaired, and it was Philippa who had brought it all about. Now Sarah knew that to love more is the only secret for overcoming that cruellest madness of jealousy, and to love more was her prayer. The dawn came at last, stealing tranquilly through the drawn curtains: with what peace and tranquillity the faint light flowed, healing and quieting her pain.

Dolly's new mamma's account of herself next morning was a little incoherent. Her health was very indifferent; she suffered agonies, and was living upon morphia when the doctor had ordered her home without delay. She had been obliged to come off at a few hours' notice; she didn't write. The Admiral was fortunately absent on a cruise, or he never would have let her go. He knew what a helpless creature she was. She had borrowed the passage-money from a friend. Would Lady Sarah please advance her a little now, as she was literally penniless, and she wished to make George and Dolly some presents, and to engage a French maid at once? She supposed she should hear by the next post and receive some remittances. She was not sure, for Hawtry was so dreadfully close about money. She did not know *what* he would say to her running away. No doubt he would use dreadful language, pious as he was; *that* she was used to; Colonel Witherington could testify to it. . . . And then

she sighed. 'I have made my own fate; I must bear my punishment,' she said. 'I shall try some German baths before his return, to brace my nerves for the—the future.'

There was something soft, harmonious, gently affecting about Dolly's mamma. When Mrs. Palmer spoke she looked at you with two brown eyes shining out of a faded but charming face: she put out an earnest white hand; there was a charming, natural affectation about her. She delighted in a situation. She was one of those fortunate people whose parts in life coincide with their dispositions. She had been twice married. As a happy wife people had thought her scarcely aware of the prize she had drawn. As an injured woman she was simply perfect. She did not feel the Admiral's indifference deeply enough to lose her self-possession, as he did. Admiral though he was, and extempore preacher, he could not always hold his own before this susceptible woman. Her gentle impressiveness completely charmed and won the children over.

The conversation of selfish people is often far more amusing than that of the unselfish, who see things too *diffusedly*, and who have not, as a rule, the gift of vivid description. Mrs. Palmer was deeply, deeply interested in her own various feelings. She used to whisper long stories to George and Dolly about her complicated sorrows, her peculiar difficulties. Poor thing! they were real enough, if she had but known them; but the troubles that really troubled her were imaginary for the most part. She had secured two valiant champions before breakfast next morning, at which meal Robert appeared. He had slept upon the crisis, and now seemed more than equal to it; affectionate to his aunt, with whom he was charmed, readily answering her many questions, skilfully avoiding the subject of her difficulties with the Admiral, of which he had heard before at Henley Court. He was pleased by his aunt's manner and

affectionate dependence, and he treated her from the first with a certain manly superiority. And yet—so she told Dolly—even Robert scarcely understood her peculiar difficulties.

'How can he, dear fellow? He is prejudiced by Lady Henley—odious woman! I can trace her influence. She was a Palmer, you know, and she is worthy of the name. I dread my visit to Yorkshire. This is my real home.'

Mrs. Palmer's mother, Lady Henley, had been an Alderville, and the Aldervilles are all young, beautiful, helpless, stout, and elegantly dressed. Mrs. Palmer took after them, she said. But helpless as Philippa was, her feebleness always leant in the direction in which she wished to go, and, in some mysterious fashion, she seemed to get on as well as other stronger people. Some young officer, in a complimentary copy of verses, had once likened her to a lily. If so, it was a water-lily that she resembled most, with its beautiful pale head drifting on the water, while underneath was a long, limp, straggling stalk firmly rooted. Only those who had tried to influence her knew of its existence.

Dolly and George hung upon her words. George felt inclined to go off to Ceylon on purpose to shoot the Admiral with one of his own Colt's revolvers. Dolly thrilled with interest and excitement and sympathy. Her mother was like a sweet angel, the girl said to her brother. It was a wonderful new life that had begun for them. The trouble which had so oppressed Dolly of late seemed almost forgotten for a time. Lady Sarah, coming and going about the house, would look with a strange half-glad, half-sad glance at the three heads so near together in the recess of the window: Philippa leaning back, flushed and pathetic; George by her side, making the most hideous faces, as he was used to do when excited; Dolly kneeling on the floor, with her two elbows in her mother's lap, and her long chin upturned

in breathless sympathy. Admiral—jealousy—meanness—cruel—mere necessaries: little words like this used to reach Lady Sarah, creaking uneasily and desolately, unnoticed, round and round the drawing-room.

'Is it not a pity, Philippa, to put such ideas into their heads?' says Lady Sarah, from the other end of the room.

Then three pair of eyes would be turned upon her with a sort of reproachful wonder, and the trio would wait until she was out of hearing to begin again.

Mrs. Palmer was certainly an adaptable woman in some ways: one husband or another, one life or another. So long as she had her emotions, her maid, her cups of tea, her comfortable sofa, and some one to listen to her, she was perfectly happy. She carried about in herself such an unfailing source of interest and solicitude, that no other was really necessary to her; although, to hear her speak, you would imagine her fate to be one long regret.

'My spirit is quite broken,' she would say, cheerfully. 'Give me that small hand-screen, Dolly; for *your* sake, Sarah, I will gladly chaperone Dolly to Cambridge, as Robert proposes (it must be after my return from Yorkshire); but I do wish you would let me write and ask for an invitation for you. George, poor fellow, wants me to bring Rhoda and the Morgan girls. I do hate girls. It is really wicked of him.'

'If that were George's worst offence——,' said his Aunt Sarah, grimly.

'My poor boy!' said Mrs. Palmer. 'Sarah, you are not a mother, and do not understand him. Come here, darling George. How I wish I could spare you from going back to those horrid examinations!'

George flushed up very red. 'I should be very sorry to be spared,' he muttered.

Mrs. Palmer used to ask Robert endless questions about Henley Court, and his aunt Lady Henley. 'Was she look-

ing as weather-beaten as ever? Did she still wear plaids? Vulgar woman!' whispered Mrs. Palmer to Dolly. Robert pretended not to hear. 'I shall make a point of going there, Robert,' she said, 'and facing the Henley buckram.' Robert gravely assured her that she would be most welcome.

Welcome, my dear Robert! You cannot imagine what an impertinent letter I have received from Joanna,' says Mrs. Palmer. 'I shall go when it is convenient to me, if only to show her that I do not care for anything she can say. Joanna's style is only to be equalled by the Admiral's. The mail will be in on Monday.'

So Philippa remained a victim, placidly sipping her coffee and awaiting the Admiral's insulting letters. The only wonder was that they had not burst their envelopes and seals, so explosive were they. His fury lashed itself into dashes and blots and frantic loops and erasures. The bills had come in for her bracelets and mufflers and tinkling ornaments. Had she forgotten the fate of the daughters of Jerusalem, that went mincing and tinkling with their feet? She might take a situation as a kitchen-maid for all he cared. She was a spendthrift, idle, extravagant, good-for-nothing, &c. &c. Not one farthing would he allow her, &c. &c.; and so on. Mrs. Palmer used to go up to her room in high spirits to lie down to rest on the days they arrived, and send for Colonel Witherington to consult upon them.

She would not come down till dinner was just over, and appeared on these occasions in a long grey sort of dressing-gown and a *négligé* little lace cap; she used to dine off almonds and raisins and cups of coffee, to Lady Sarah's secret indignation. 'Oh, Sarah, *you* will not turn me away?' Mrs. Palmer would say, leaning back in languid comfort. Lady Sarah was very sorry, but somewhat sceptical. She would meet Pauline carrying French novels to the library after scenes which had nearly unnerved them all.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TERRACE AT ALL SAINTS' COLLEGE.

Die Rose, die Lilie, die Taube, die Sonne,
Die liebt ich einst alle in Liebeswonne.
—HEINE.

SOMEWHERE in the fairyland of Dorothea's imagination rises a visionary city, with towers and gables straggling against the sky. The streets go up hill and down hill, leading by cloisters and gateways and bywalls, behind which gardens are lying like lakes of green among the stones and the ivy. A thrush is singing, and the shrill echoes of some boyish melancholy voices come from a chapel hard by. It is a chapel with a pile of fantastic columns standing in the quiet corner of a lane. All round the side door are niches and winding galleries, branches wreathing, placed there by faithful hands, crisp saints beatified in stony glory. Are these, one is tempted to ask, as one looks at the generous old piles, the stones that cry out now-a-days when men are silent? They have, for the last century or two, uttered warnings and praises to many a generation passing by; speaking to some of a bygone faith, to others of a living one. They still tell of past love and hope, and of past and present charity.

But in these times charity is a destroying angel; even the divine attributes seem to have changed, and Faith, Hope, and Charity have gone each their separate way.

To Dolly Vanborough, who had thought happiness was over for ever, it was the first great song of her youth that these old stones sang to her on her eighteenth birthday. She hears it still, though her youth is past. It is the song of the wonder of life, of the divine in the human. As we go on its echoes reach us repeated again and again, reverberating from point to point; who that has heard them once will ever forget them? To some they come with happiness and the delight of new undreamt-of sympathy, to others with sorrow and the realisation of love. . . . Its strains came with prayer and long fasting to the saints of old. This song of Pentecost, I know no better name for it, echoes on from generation to generation from one heart to another. Sometimes by chance one has looked into a stranger's face and seen its light reflected. Frank Raban saw its light in Dolly's face that day as she came out of the chapel to where her brother had left her. Just for an instant it was there while the psalm still sung in her heart. And yet the light in Dolly's face dimmed a little when she saw, not the person she had expected to see, but Mr. Raban waiting there.

'I came in Henley's place,' said he, hastily, guessing her thought. 'He was sent for by the Vice-Chancellor, and begged me to come and tell you this. He will join us directly.'

Mr. Raban had been waiting in the sunshiny street while Dolly deliberately advanced down the worn steps of the chapel, crossed the flagged court, and came out of the narrow iron wicket of which the barred shadow fell upon her white fête-day dress. Miss Vanborough's face was shaded by a broad hat with curling blue feathers; she wore a pink rose in her girdle; it was no saintly costume; she was but a commonplace mortal maiden in sprigged muslin, and saints wear, as we all know, red and blue, and green stained glass and damask and goatskins; and yet Frank Raban thought

there was something saint-like in her bright face, which, for an instant, seemed reflecting all her heart.

'Henley lives on my staircase,' continued Raban. 'Those pink frills are his. He makes himself comfortable, as you see.'

'I'm glad of that,' said Dolly, smiling. 'How nice it must be for you to have him so near.'

'He always takes ladies to see his rooms,' Raban continued. 'He is a great favourite with them, and gives tea-parties.'

'A great favourite!' said Dolly, warmly. 'Of course one likes people who are kind and good and clever and true and nice.'

'Who are, in short, an addition sum, made up of equal portions of all the cardinal virtues,' said Raban.

He was ashamed of himself, and yet he did not care to hear Henley's praises from Dolly. It seemed to him dishonest to acquiesce.

Dolly stopped for half a second and looked at him.

Dorothea was a tall woman and their eyes were on a line, and their looks met. My heroine was at no pains to disguise the meaning of her indignant glances. 'How can you be so ungenerous?' she said, as plainly as if she had spoken.

Frank answered her silence in words.

'No, I don't like him,' he said, 'and he don't like me; and I don't care to pretend to better feelings than I really have. We are civil enough, and pull very well together. I beg your pardon. I own he deserves to succeed,' said the young man. 'There, Miss Vanborough, this is our garden, where we refresh ourselves with cigars and beer after our arduous studies.'

Dolly was still too much vexed to express her admiration.

They all began calling to them from under the tree. John Morgan, who was of the party, was lying flat upon his

broad back, beaming at the universe, and fanning away the flies. Rhoda was sitting on the grass, in a foam of white muslin and Algerian shawls. George Vanborough, privileged for the day, was astride on a wooden table; a distant peacock went strutting across the lawn; a little wind came blowing gently, stirring all the shadows; a college bell began to tinkle a little, and then left off.

'Glorious afternoon, isn't it?' says John Morgan, from the grass.

'It is like heaven,' says Dolly, looking up and round and about.

Rhoda's slim fingers clasp her pearl locket, which has come out again. They were in the shade, the sun was shining hot and intense upon the old garden. The roses, like bursting bubbles, were breaking in the heat against the old baked bricks, upon rows of prim collegiate flowers: lilies, and stocks, and marigolds. There was a multiplicity of sweet scents in the air, of shadows falling on the lawns (they flow from the old gates to the river); a tone is struck, an insect floats away along the garden wall. With its silence and flowers, and tremulous shades and sunshine, I know no sweeter spot than the old garden of All Saints'.

The gardener had placed seats and a bench under the old beech-tree for pilgrims to rest upon, weary with their journeys from shrine to shrine. Mrs. Palmer was leaning back in a low garden-chair; the sweep of her flowing silks seemed to harmonise with her languid and somewhat melancholy grace. Rhoda was helping to open her parasol (the parasol was dove-coloured and lined with pink). There was a row of Morgans upon the bench; Mrs. Morgan upright in the midst, nicely curled and trimmed with satin bows and a white muslin daughter on either side.

It all happened in a moment: the sky burnt overhead, the sun shone upon the river, upon the colleges, with their

green gardens: the rays seemed to strike fire where they met the water. The swans were sailing along the stream in placid state, followed by their grey brood, skimming and paddling in and out among the weeds and the green stems and leaves that sway with the ripple of the waters; a flight of birds high overhead crossed the vault of the heavens and disappeared in the distance. Dorothea Vanborough was standing on the terrace at the end of the old college garden, where everything was so still, so sweet, and so intense that it seemed as if time was not, as if the clocks had stopped on their travels, as if no change could ever be, nor hours nor seasons sweep through the tranquil old place.

They were all laughing and talking; but Dolly, who was too lazy and too happy to talk, wandered away from them a little bit, to the garden's end, where she stood stooping over the low wall and watching the water flow by; there was a man fishing on the opposite bank, and casting his line again and again. In the distance a boat was drifting along the stream, some insects passed out towards the meadows humming their summer drone, a wasp sailed by. Dolly was half standing, half-sitting, against the low terrace wall; with one hand she was holding up her white muslin skirt, with the other she was grasping the ledge of the old bricks upon which the lichen had been at work spreading their gold and grey. So the girl waited, sunning herself; herself a part of the summer's day, and gently blooming and rejoicing in its sweetness like any rose upon the wall.

There are blissful moments when one's heart seems to beat in harmony with the great harmony: when one is oneself light and warmth, and the delight of light, and a voice in the comfortable chorus of contentment and praise all round about. Such a minute had come to Dolly in her white muslin dress, with the Cam flowing at her feet and the lights dazzling her grey eyes.

Mrs. Morgan gave a loud sneeze under the tree, and the beautiful minute broke and dispersed away.

'I wonder what it can be like to grow old,' Dolly wonders, looking up; 'to remember back for years and years, and to wear stiff curls and satinette?' Dolly began to picture to herself a long procession of future selves, each older and more curiously bedizened than the other. Somehow they seemed to make a straight line between herself and Mrs. Morgan under the tree. It was an uncomfortable fancy. Dolly tried to forget it, and leant over the wall, and looked down into the cool depths of the stream again. Was that fish rising? What was this? Her own face again looking up from the depth. Then Dolly turned, hearing a step upon the gravel, to see Robert Henley coming towards her. He was dressed in his college cap and gown, and he advanced, floating balloon-like, along the terrace. He looked a little strange, she thought, as he came up to her.

'I couldn't get away before,' he said. 'I hope you have been well looked after.'

'Yes, indeed. Come and sit down here, Robert. What a delicious old garden this is! We are all so happy! Look at those dear little swans in the river!'

'Do you like the cygnets?' said Robert, abruptly, as he looked her full in the face, and sat down on the low wall beside her. 'Do you remember Charles Martindale?' he asked; 'we met once at John Morgan's, who went out to India? He is coming home next October.'

'Is he?' said Dolly. 'Look at that little grey cygnet scuttling away!'

'Dolly,' said Henley, quickly, 'they sent for me to offer me his place, and I—I—have accepted it.'

'Accepted it?' said his cousin, forgetting the cygnets, and looking up a little frightened. Will you have to go to India and leave everybody?'

Her face changed a little, and Robert's brightened, though he tried to look as usual.

'Not everybody,' he said. 'Not if ——' He took the soft hand in his that was lying on the wall beside him. 'Dolly! will you come too?' he said.

'Me?' cried the unabashed Dolly. 'Oh, Robert, how could I?'

'You could come if I married you,' said Robert, in his quiet voice and most restrained manner. 'Dearest Dorothea, don't you think you can learn to love me? It will be nearly five months before I start.'

It was all so utterly incomprehensible that the girl did not quite realise her cousin's words. Robert was looking very strange and unlike himself; Dolly could hardly believe that it was not some effect of the dazzle of light in her own eyes. He was paler than usual; he seemed somehow stirred from his habitual ways and self. She thought it was not even his voice that she heard speaking. 'Is this being in love?' she was saying to herself. A little bewildered flush came into her cheeks. She still saw the sky, and the garden, and the figures under the tree; then for a minute everything vanished, as tangible things vanish before the invisible,—just as spoken words are hushed and lose their meaning when the silent voices cry out.

It was but for a moment. There she stood again, staring at Robert with her innocent, grey-eyed glance.

Henley was a big, black-and-white melancholy young man, with a blue shaved chin. To-day his face was pale, his mouth was quivering, his hair was all on end. Could this be Robert who was so deliberate; who always knew his own mind; who looked at his watch so often in church while music was going on? Even now, from habit, he was turning it about in his pocket. This little trick made Dolly feel more than anything else that it was all true—that her cousin

loved her—incredible though it might appear—and yet even still she doubted.

'*Me*, Robert?' repeated Dorothea, in her clear, childish tones, looking up with her frank yet timid eyes. 'Are you *sure*?'

'I have been sure ever since I first saw you,' said Henley, smiling down at her, 'at Kensington, three years ago. Do you remember the snowball, Dolly?'

Then Dolly's eyes fell, and she stood with a tender, puzzled face, listening to her first tale of love. She suddenly pulled away her hand, shy and blushing.

The swans had hardly passed beyond the garden-terrace; the fisherman had only thown his line once again; Dolly's mamma had time to shift her parasol; that was all. Henley waited, with his handsome head a little bent. He was regaining his composure; he knew too much of his cousin's uncompromising ways to be made afraid by her silence. He stood pulling at his watch, and looking at her—at the straight white figure amid dazzling blue and green; at the line of the sweet face still turned away from him.

'I thought you would have understood me better?' he said, reproachfully.

Still Dolly could not speak. For a moment her heart had beat with an innocent triumph, and then came a doubt. Did she love him—could she love him? Had he then cared for her all this time, when she herself had been so cold and so indifferent, and thinking so little of him? Only yesterday she had told Rhoda she would never marry. Was it yesterday? No, it was to-day, an hour ago. . . . What had she done to deserve so much from him?—what had she done to be so overprized and loved? At the thought quick upspringing into her two grey eyes came the tears, sparkling like the diamonds in Rhoda's cross.

'I never thought you thought'—Dolly began. 'Oh,

Robert! you have been in earnest all this time, and I only —only playing.'

'Don't be unhappy,' said her cousin. 'It was very natural; I should not have wished it otherwise. I did not want to speak to you till I had something worth your acceptance.'

'All this long time!' repeated Dolly.

Did the explanations of true love ever yet run smooth? 'Dolly!' cried Mrs. Palmer, from under the tree.

'Hulloa, Robert!' shouted George, coming across the grass towards them.

'Oh, Robert!' said Dorothea, earnestly, unexpectedly, with a sudden resolution to be true—true to him and to herself, 'thank you a thousand times for what you have told me: only it mustn't be—I don't care enough for you, dear Robert! You deserve ——'

Henley said not a word. He stood with a half-incredulous smile; his eyes were still fixed on Dolly's sweet face; he did not answer George, who again called out something as he came up. As for Dolly, she turned to her brother and sprang to meet him, and took his arm as if for protection, and then she walked quickly away without another look, and Henley remained standing where she had been. Instead of the white-muslin maiden, the cygnets may have seen a black-silk young man, who looked at his watch, and then walked away too; while the fisherman quietly baited his line and went on with his sport.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ROSES HAVE THORNS AND SILVER FOUNTAINS MUD.

Love me with thine hand stretched out,
Freely, open-minded,
Love me with thy loitering foot,
Hearing one behind it.

THE doors of the old Library at All Saints' were open wide to admit the sunshine: it lighted up the starched frill collars of *Fundator noster* as he hung over the entrance. It was good stiff starch, near four hundred years old. The volumes stood in their places, row upon row, line after line, twinkling into the distant corners of the room; here and there a brass lock gleamed, or some almost forgotten title in faded gold, or the links of the old Bible chained to its oaken stand. . . . So the books stood marshalled in their places: brown, and swept by time, by dust, brushed by the passing generations that had entered one by one, bringing their spoils, and placing them safe upon the shelves, and vanishing away. What a silent Babel and medley of time, and space, and languages, and fancies, and follies! Here and there stands a fat dictionary, or prophetic grammar, the interpreter of echoes to other echoes. So, from century to century, the tradition is handed down, and from silent print and signs it thrills into life and sound. . . .

Those are not books, but living voices in the recess of the old library. There is a young man stumping up and down

the narrow passage, a young woman leaning against a worm-eaten desk. Are they talking of roots, of curves? or are they youthful metaphysicians speculating upon the unknown powers of the soul?

'Oh! George,' Dolly says, 'I am glad you think I was right.'

'Right! Of course you would have been very wrong to do otherwise,' says George, as usual, extremely indignant. 'Of course you are right to refuse him: you don't care for him; I can see that at a glance. . . . It is out of the question. Poor fellow! He is a very good fellow, but not at all worthy of you. It is altogether preposterous. No, Dolly,' said the young fellow, melting; 'you don't know—how should you?—what it is—what the real thing is. Never let yourself be deceived by any Brummagem and paste, when the real Koh-i-noor is still to be found—a gem of the purest water,' said George, gently.

Dolly listened, but she was only half convinced by George's earnestness. 'I would give anything that this had not happened,' the young man went on. Dolly listened, and said but little in answer. When George scolded her for having unduly encouraged Robert, she meekly denied the accusation, though her brother would not accept her denial.

'Had she then behaved so badly? Was Robert unhappy? Would he never forgive her? Should she never see him again?' Dolly listened sadly, wondering, and leaning against the old desk. There was a book lying open upon it—the History of the Universe—with many pictures of strange beasts and serpents, roaring, writhing, and whisking their tails, with the Garden of Eden mapped out, and the different sorts of angels and devils duly enumerated. Dolly's mind was not on the old book, but in the world outside it; she was standing again by the river and listening to Robert's voice. The story he told her no longer seemed new and

strange. It was ended for ever, and yet it would never finish as long as she lived. She had thought no one would ever care for her, and he had loved her, and she had sent him away; but he had loved her. Had she made a mistake, notwithstanding all that George was saying? Dolly, loving the truth, loving the right, trying for it heartily, in her slow circuitous way, might make mistakes in life, but they would be honest ones, and that is as much as any of us can hope for, and so, if she strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel, it will be forgiven her. George's opposition was too vague to influence her. When he warned her against Henley, it sounded unreasonable. Warning! There was no need of warning. She had said no to her cousin. Already the terrace seemed distant miles and miles off, hours and hours ago, though she could see it through the window, and the swans on the river, and the sunlight striking flame upon the water: she could hardly realise that she had been there, and that with a word and a hasty movement she had sent Robert away of her own deliberate will.

'Yes,' said George, coming up and banging his hand down upon the big book before her; 'you were right, Dolly. He isn't half good enough for you. This is not like the feeling that I and Rhoda ——'

But Dolly interrupted him almost angrily. 'Not good enough! It is because he is too good, George, that I—I am not—not worthy of him.'

It was more than she could bear to hear George speaking so.

Was Robert unhappy? had she used him ill? The thoughts seemed to smite her as they passed. She began to cry again—foolish girl!—and George, as he watched her worthless tears dribbling down upon the valuable manuscript, began to think that perhaps, after all, his sister had wished him to blame, instead of approving of her decision.

He was bound to sympathise, since she had kept his secret. 'Don't, Dolly,' he said; 'you will spoil the little devils if you cry over the book.' He spoke so kindly, that Dolly smiled, and began to wipe her eyes. It was not a little thing that George should speak so kindly to her again. When she looked up she saw that he was signalling, and bowing, and waving his cap through the open window.

'It is the girls. They ought not to miss our college library,' he said, gravely; and then he walked towards the door, to meet a sound of voices and a trampling of feet.

As for Dorothea, with a sudden shy impulse she escaped, tears, handkerchief, and all, and disappeared into the most distant niche of the gallery: many footsteps came sounding up the wooden staircase, and Henley's voice was mingling with the Miss Morgans' shrill treble.

'How funny to see so many books!' said Zoe, who was a very stupid girl. (Clever people generally make the same remarks as stupid ones, only they are in different words.)

'What a delicious old place!' cried Rhoda, coming in. She was usually silent, and not given to ecstasies.

'Why didn't John bring us here before?' said Cassie. 'I do envy you, Mr. George. How nice to be able to read all these books!'

'I am not so sure of that,' said George, laughing.

Meanwhile, Zoe had stumped up to the desk, where the history of the whole world was lying open.

'Why, look here,' she said; 'somebody has been reading, I do believe. How funny!'

As for Henley, he had already begun to examine the pictures that hung over every niche. He did not miss one of them as he walked quickly down the gallery. In the last niche of all he found the picture he was in search of. It was not that of a dignitary of the church. It was a sweet face, with brown crisp locks, and clear grey eyes shining from

beneath a frown. The face changed, as pictures don't change, when he stood in the arch of the little recess. The pale cheeks glowed, the frown trembled and cleared away. She wondered if he would speak to her or go away. Henley hesitated for an instant, and—spoke.

'Dolly, that was not an answer you gave me just now. You did not think that would content me, did you?' he said; and as he looked at her fixedly, her eyes fell. 'Dolly, you do love me a little?' he cried; 'you cannot send me away?'

'I thought I ought to send you away,' she faltered, looking up at last, and her whole heart was in her face. 'Robert, I don't know if I love you; but I love you to love me,' she said. And her sweet voice trembled as she spoke.

He had no misgivings. 'Dearest Dolly,' he said, in a low voice. 'In future you must trust to me. *I* will take care of you. You need not have been afraid. I quite understood your feelings just now, and I would not urge you then. Now . . .' He did not finish the sentence.

When Dolly, the frigid maiden, surrendered, it was with a shy reluctant grace. Hers was not a passionate nature, but a loving one; feeling with her was not a single simple emotion, but a complicated one of many impulses: of self-diffidences, of deep, deep, strange aspirations, that she herself could scarcely understand. Humility, a woman's pride, the delight of companionship and sympathy, and of the guidance of a stronger will: a longing for better things. All these things were there. Ah! she would try to be worthier of him. It was a snow and ice and fire maiden who put her trembling hand into Robert's, and whom he clasped for an instant in his arms.

Meanwhile some of the party had straggled off again to the hotel after Mrs. Palmer. George was to escort the

young ladies, who seemed determined to stay on turning over the manuscripts; the unlucky Zoe was babbling innocently, knocking over stools and playfully pulling Latin sermons and dictionaries out of their places on the shelves. George, while he made himself agreeable in his peculiar fashion, was wondering what was going on at the farther end of the library. He longed to tell Rhoda and ask her advice; but that tiresome Zoe was for ever interrupting. Was this a very old book? Did he like Greek or Latin best? She thought it all looked very stupid. Was Rhoda coming to the hotel to rest before dinner? And so on. Rhoda must have guessed what was in George's mind, for presently she started away from the page over which she was leaning, and went to the window.

'Shall we go out a little way?' she said, gently. 'One would like to be everywhere to-day.'

'I'm sure we have been everywhere,' said Zoe.

'I know you are tired. I shall not allow you to come, dear Zoe,' said Rhoda, affectionately. 'You must rest; I insist upon it. You look quite worn out. Mr. George, will you help me?' And Rhoda began struggling with a heavy chair, which she pulled into the window. 'And here is a stool,' said Rhoda, 'for your feet. We will come back for you directly. My head aches; I want a little fresh air.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Zoe, doubtfully. '*Do* I look tired, Rhoda? I am sure . . .' But Rhoda was gone before she had time to say more. Zoe was not sure if she was pleased or not. It was just like Rhoda: she never could understand what people wanted, really; she was always kissing them and getting them chairs out of the way. No doubt she meant to be kind. Rest! anybody could rest for themselves. What was that noise? 'Who is there?' says Zoe, out loud, but there was no answer. Yes, she wanted to

be with the others. Why did they poke her away up here? by leaning out of the open window she could just see the ivy wall, and the garden beyond. There was no one left under the tree. They were all gone: just like them. How was she to find her way to the hotel! It was all very well for Rhoda, who had George Vanborough at her beck and call; they knew well enough *she* had nobody to take care of her, and they should have waited for her. That was what Zoe thought. There was that noise again, and a murmur, and some one stirring. Poor Zoe jumped up with her heart in her mouth; she knocked over the stool; she stood prepared to fly; she heard some one whispering; they might be garotters, ghosts, proctors—horror! Her terrors overpower her. Her high heels clatter down the wooden stairs, out into the sunny, silent court, where her footsteps echo as she runs—poor nymph flying from an echo! George and Rhoda are walking quietly up and down in the sunshine just beyond the ivy gate: their two shadows are flitting as they go. John Morgan is coming in at the great entrance. Zoe rushes up to him, panting with her terror.

'Oh, John,' she says, 'I didn't know where to go. Why don't you stop with me? I was all alone, and . . .'

'Why, Zoe, tired already! Come along quick to the hotel,' says John, 'or you won't get any rest before dinner.'

They caught up the Morgans on their way, and met Raban, coming out of Trinity. Meanwhile Robert and Dorothea are leisurely following along the street. Henley had regained his composure by this time, and could meet the others with perfect equanimity. Not so his cousin. So many lights were coming and going in her face, so many looks and apparitions, that Robert thought every one must guess what had happened, as they came into the common sitting-room, where some five-o'clock tea was spread. But there is nothing more true than that people don't see the

great facts that are starting before their very eyes, so busy are they with the details of life. Mrs. Palmer was trying to disentangle the silk strings of her bag as they came in (she had a fancy for carrying a bag), and she did not observe her daughter's emotion.

Then came a clatter of five-o'clock teacups at the hotel; of young men coming and going, or waiting to escort them according to the kindly college fashion. Dolly was not sorry that she could find no opportunity to speak to her mother. Mrs. Palmer's feelings were not to be trifled with; and Dolly, in her agitation, scarcely felt strong enough to bear a scene. Robert stayed for a few minutes, rang the bell for hot water, helped to move a horsehair sofa, to open the window.

What foolish little memories Dolly treasured up in after-life of tea-making and tea-talking. Poor child, her memories were not so very many, but nothing is small and nothing is great at times.

Frank Raban stood a little apart talking to Rhoda, whose wonderful liquid eyes were steadily fixed upon him. George, on the sofa by his mother, was alternately biting his lips, frowning at Dolly over her tea and love-making, and at Rhoda and her companion.

'Darling George, cannot you keep your feet still?' said Mrs. Palmer. 'Are you going, Mr. Raban? Shall we not see you again?'

'I shall have the honour of meeting you at dinner,' said Raban, stiffly. 'I would come and show you the way, but Mr. Henley has promised to see you safe.'

Every one seemed coming into the room at once, drinking tea, going away. There seemed two or three Georges: there were certainly two Dorotheas present. Henley only was composed enough for them all, and twice prevented his cousin from pouring all the sugar into the milk-jug.

In the middle of the table there was a plateful of

flowers, arranged by the waiter. Robert took out a little sprig of verbena, which he gave to Dorothea. She stuck it in her girdle, and put it away, when she got home, between the leaves of her prayer-book, where it still lies, in memory of the past, a dried-up twig that was once green and sweet. Rhoda, after Raban had left her, came up with her tea-cup, and, for want of something to do, began pulling the remaining flowers out of the dish.

'I can't bear to see flowers so badly used,' said Rhoda, piling up the sand with her quick, clever fingers. 'George, will you give me some water?'

In a few minutes the ugly flat dishful began to bloom quite freshly.

'That is very nicely done,' George said, sarcastically. 'Why didn't you get Raban to help you to arrange the flowers, Rhoda, before he left?'

'We were talking, and I didn't like to interrupt him,' said Rhoda. 'I was asking him all about political economy.'

George's ugly face flushed.

'Are you satisfied that the supply of admiration equals the demand?' said George.

'George, how can you talk so?' says Rhoda.

An hour later they were all straggling down the narrow cross-streets that led to the college again.

Dolly came, walking shyly by her lover's side; Mrs. Palmer leant heavily upon John Morgan's arm. Every moment she dropped her long dress, and had to wait to gather the folds together. Surely the twilight of that summer's day was the sweetest twilight that Dolly had ever set eyes upon. It came creeping from the fields beyond the river, from alley to alley, from one college to another. It seemed to the excited girl to be a soft tranquillising veil let down upon the agitations and excitements of the day. She watched it growing in the old hall, where she presently sat

at the cross-table under the very glance of the ubiquitous *Fundator*, who was again present in his frill and short cloak, between the two deep-cut windows.

The long table crossed the hall, with a stately decoration of gold and silver cups all down the centre; there were oaken beams overhead; old college servants in attendance. The great silver tankards went round brimming with claret and hock, and with straggling stems of burrage floating on fragrant seas.

By what unlucky chance did it happen that some one had written out the names of the guests, each in their place, and that Dolly found a strange young don on one side of her plate, and Raban on the other? Henley did not wish to excite remark, and subsided into the place appointed for him, when he found that he was not to sit where he chose.

'Drink, Dolly,' said George, who was sitting opposite to her; 'let us drink a toast.'

'What shall I drink?' asked Dolly.

'Shall we drink a toast to fortune?' said George, leaning forward.

'I shall drink to the new President of the College of Boggleywollah,' says John Morgan, heartily.

Dolly raised her eyes shyly as she put her lips to the enormous tankard and sipped a health.

As for Raban, he did not drink the toast, although he must have guessed something of what had happened. He never spoke to Dolly, though he duly attended to her wants, and handed bread, and salt, and silver flagons, and fruit, and gold spoons: still he never spoke. She was conscious that he was watching her. In some strange way the dislike and mistrust he felt for Henley seemed reflected upon poor Dorothea again. Why had she been flirting and talking to that man? She, of all women, Robert Henley, of all men,

thought Raban, as he handed her a pear. Mrs. Palmer looked at Dorothea more than once during dinner. The girl had two burning cheeks; she did not eat; she scarcely answered the young don when she was spoken to by him; but once Henley leant forward and said something, then she looked up quickly. Stoicism is after all but a relic of barbarous times, and may be greatly over-rated.

Dolly had not yet grown so used to her thick-coming experience that she could always look cold when she was moved, dull when she was troubled, indifferent when her whole heart was in a moment's decision. Later it all came easier to her, as it does to most of us. As the ladies left the dining-room Henley got up to let them out, and made a little sign to Dolly to wait behind. Being in a yielding mood, she lingered a minute in the anteroom, looking for her cloak, and allowed the others to pass on. Henley had closed the door behind him and come out, and seemed to be searching too. It was very dark in the anteroom, of which the twilight windows were small and screened by green plants. While her aunt was being draped in bournouses by Rhoda, and Mrs. Morgan's broad back was turned upon them, Dorothea waited for an instant, and said, 'What is it, Robert?' looking up with her doubtful, yet kindly glance.

'Dear Dorothea, I wanted to make sure it was all true,' said Robert, with one of the few touches of romance which he had experienced in all his well-considered existence. 'I began to think it was a dream, and I thought I should like to ask you.'

'Whether it is all a dream?' said Dolly, almost sadly. 'It is not I who can answer that question; but you see,' she added, smiling, 'that I have begun to do as you tell me. They will think I am lost.' And she sprang away, with a little wave of the hand.

CHAPTER XXV.

GOOD-NIGHT.

Love us, God! love us, man! we believe, we achieve.
Let us live, let us love,
For the acts correspond:
We are Glorious, and Dis.

—E. B. B.

'GOOD-NIGHT, dearest Dolly,' whispered Henley, as they all stood waiting for their train in the crowded station. 'You can tell your mother as you go home.'

'Here, Dolly! jump in,' cried John Morgan, standing by an open railway-door; 'your aunt is calling you.'

'I can't come up till Tuesday,' Henley went on in a low voice, 'but I shall write to your mother to-night.'

He helped her into the dark carriage: everybody seemed to lean forward at once and say good-night; there was a whistle, a guard banged the door, Mrs. Palmer stretched her long neck through the window, but the train carried her off before she could speak her last words.

Dolly just saw Henley turning away, and George under a lamp-post; then they were gone out of the station into the open country; wide and dim it flowed on either side into the dusk. The day had come to an end—the most wonderful day in Dolly's life. Was it a real day; was it a day out of somebody else's existence? As Dolly sat down beside her mother she had felt as if her heart would break with wonder and happiness; it was not big enough to hold the love that

was her portion. He loved her! She had floated into some new world where she had never been before; where people had been living all their lives, thought Dolly, and she had never even guessed at it.

Had her mother felt like this? Had Frank Raban's poor young wife felt this when he married her? So she wondered, looking up at the clear evening sky. Might not death itself be this, only greater still and completer—too complete for human beings? Dolly had got her mother's hand tight in hers. 'My dear child, take care, take care!' cried Mrs. Palmer, sharply; 'my poor fingers are *so* tender, Mr. Morgan; and Dolly's is *such* a grip. I remember once when the Admiral, with his great driving gloves' . . . . Her voice sank away, and Dolly's mamma began telling John Morgan all about one episode in her life.

Meanwhile, Dolly went on with her speculations. How surprised Aunt Sarah would be; how surprised she was herself. Dolly had had a dream, so have most young maidens, formless, voiceless, indefinitely vague, but with a meaning to it all the same, and a *soul;* and here was Robert, and the soul was his, and he loved her! 'Thanks, half-way up,' murmured Mrs. Palmer to a strange passenger who did not belong to the party.

'Tired, Zoe?' said John to his sister: 'a little bit sleepy, eh?'

'Everybody thinks I'm always tired,' said Zoe, in an aggrieved tone: 'Rhoda made me rest ever so long when I didn't want to; she popped me down on a stool in that stupid old library, and said I looked quite worn out, and then she was off in a minute, and I had to wait, oh! ever so long, and I was frightened by noises.'

'Poor Zoe!' said John, laughing.

'It was too bad of her; and then they all kept leaving me behind,' continued Zoe, growing more and more miserable,

'and now you say it has been too much for me: I am sure I wouldn't have missed coming for anything.'

'Next time we go anywhere you keep with me, Zoe,' said John, good-humouredly, 'and you shan't be left behind.'

'I think we are all tired,' said Mrs. Palmer, languidly, 'and we shall be thankful to get home. Dolly, my darling, you don't speak; are you quite worn out too?'

Dolly looked out from her dreams with a glance of so much life and sweetness in her bright face—even the dim lamp-light could not hide her happy looks—that her mother was struck by it. 'You strange child,' she said, 'what are you made of? You look brighter than when we started.'

'Dolly is made of a capital stuff called youth and good spirits,' said John Morgan, kindly.

The rest of the journey was passed in shifting the windows to Mrs. Palmer's various sensations. They all parted hurriedly, as people do after a long day's pleasuring, only Dolly found time to give Rhoda a kiss. She felt more kindly towards her than she had done for many a day past. Rhoda looked curiously, and a little maliciously, into Dolly's face. But she could not read anything more than she guessed already.

Mrs. Palmer was greatly disturbed to find herself driving home alone with Dolly in the hansom.

'I am afraid of cabmen. I am not accustomed to them. John Morgan should have come with me,' Mrs. Palmer said. 'I am sure the Admiral would not approve of this! Ah! he will be over. Dolly, darling, ask the man if he is sober. Dear me, I wish Robert was here.'

Dolly, too, was wishing that Robert was there instead of herself. Her heart began to beat as she thought of what she had to say. She looked up at Mrs. Palmer's pale face in the bright moonlight through which they were driving homewards; through parks silver and silent and transformed.

They come to the river and cross the bridge; the water is flowing, hushed, and mysterious: the bridge throws a great shadow upon the water; one barge is slowly passing underneath the arch. The dim, distant crowd of spires, of chimneys, and slated roofs, are illumined and multiplied by strange silver lights. Overhead a planet is burning and sinking where the sun set while they were still in the college garden. The soft moon-wind comes sweeping fresh into their faces, and Dolly from this trance awakens to whisper, 'Mamma! I have something to tell you—something that Robert——

'He will throw us over! I know he will!' interrupts Mrs. Palmer, as the cab gave a jolt. 'It is quite unsafe, Dolly, without a gentleman.'

Poor Dolly forced herself to go on. She took her mother's hand: 'Dear mamma, don't be afraid.'

'He was not sober. I thought so at the time,' cried Mrs. Palmer, with a nervous shriek, as they came off the bridge.

Then the cab went more quietly, and Dolly found words to tell her news. So the hansom drove on, carrying many agitations and exclamations along with it. The driver from his moonlit perch may have heard the sounds within. Mrs. Palmer spared herself and Dolly no single emotion. She was faint, she was hysterical, she rallied, she was overcome. Why had she not been told before? she had known it all along; she had mentioned it to the Admiral before her departure; he had sneered at her foolish dreams. Dolly would never have to learn the bitter deception of some wasted lives. Cruel boy! why had he not told her? why so reserved?

'He feared that it would agitate you,' Dolly said, feeling that Robert had been right. 'He told me to tell you now, dear.'

'Dear fellow, he is so thoughtful,' said Mrs. Palmer. 'Now he will be my son, Dolly, my real son. I never could have endured any one of those Henley girls for him. How

angry Lady Henley will be. I warned Robert long ago that she would want him for one of them. Dolly, you must not be married yet. You must wait till the Admiral returns. He must give you away.'

When Dolly told her that Robert wanted to be married before he left for India, Mrs. Palmer said it was preposterous. He might have to sail any day,—that Master told her so; the fat old gentleman in the white neckcloth. 'No, my Dolly, we shall have you till Robert comes back. Let the man keep the shilling for his own use.'

They had reached the turnpike by this time, with its friendly beacon-fire burning, and the red-faced man had come out with three pennies ready in his hand. Then by dark trees, rustling behind the walls of the old gardens; past the palace avenue-gates, where the sentry was pacing, with the stars shining over his head; they come to the ivy-gate at home, and with its lamp burning red in the moonlight. Marker opened the door before they had time to ring.

'Softly, my dear,' said Marker to Dolly, in a sort of whisper. 'My lady is asleep; she has not been well, and—'

'Not well!' said Mrs. Palmer. 'How fortunate she did not come. What should we have done with her? I am quite worn out, Marker; we have had a long day. Let Julie make me a cup of coffee, and bring it up to my room. Good-night, my precious Dolly. Don't speak to me, or I shall scream!'

'Marker, is Aunt Sarah ill?' said Dolly, anxious, she knew not why.

'Don't be frightened, my dear,' said Marker; 'it is nothing; that is, the Doctor says she only wants rest.'

Dolly went up to her own room, flitting carefully along the passage, and shading her light. Lady Sarah's door was closed. Mrs. Palmer was safe for the night, with Julie in attendance. Dolly could hear their voices, as she went by. In her own little room all was in order, and cool and straight

for her coming. The window was open, the moonlight fell upon her little bed, where she had dreamt so many peaceful dreams, and Dolly set her light upon the window-seat, and stood looking out. She was half radiant still, half saddened. All the sights and sounds of that long, eventful day were passing before her still: ringing, dazzling, repeating themselves on the darkness. . . . . Was it possible that he loved her—that she loved him? The trees rustled, the familiar strokes of the church clock came striking twelve, swinging through darkness into silence. 'Do I love him? I think so,' said Dolly to herself. 'I hope so.' And with an honest heart, she told herself that all should be well. Then she wondered if she should sleep that night; she seemed to be living over every single bit of her life at once. She longed to tell Aunt Sarah her wonderful story. A cockchafer sailed in at the open window, and Dolly moved the light to save its straggling legs; a little wind came blowing in, and then Dolly thought she heard a sound as of a door below opening softly. Was her aunt awake and stirring? She caught up the light and crept down to see. She could hear Julie and Mrs. Palmer still discoursing.

There is something sacred about a sick-room at times. It seems like holy ground to people coming in suddenly out of the turmoil and emotion of life. Dolly's excitement was hushed as she entered and saw Lady Sarah lying quietly stretched out asleep upon a sofa. It had been wheeled to the window, which was wide open. The curtain was flapping, all the medicine bottles stood in rows on the table and along the shelves. There lay Sarah, with her grey hair smoothed over her brown face, very still and sleeping peacefully—as peacefully as if she was young still, and loved, and happy, with life before her: though, for the matter of that, people whose life is nearly over have more right to sleep at peace than those who have got to encounter they know not what

trials and troubles—struggles with others, and, most deadly of all, with that terrible shadow of self that rises with fresh might, striking with so sure an aim. What does the mystery mean? Who is the familiar enemy that our spirit is set to overcome and to struggle with all the night until the dawn? There lay poor Sarah's life-adversary, then, nearly worn, nearly overcome, sleeping and resting while the spirit was travelling I know not to what peaceful regions.

Dolly crept in and closed the door. Lady Sarah never stirred. A long time seemed to pass. The wind rose again, the curtain flapped, and the light flickered, and time seemed creeping slowly and more slowly to the tune of the sleeping woman's languid breath. It was a strange ending to the long, glittering day, but at last a flush came into Sarah Francis's cheeks, and she opened her eyes. . . . A strange new something was in that placid face—a look. What is it, that first look of change and blurr in features that have melted so tranquilly before us from youth to middle-age, or from middle-age to age, modulating imperceptibly? The light of Dolly's own heart was too dazzling for her to be in a very observant mood just then.

'Is that my Dolly?' said the sick woman.

Dolly sprang forward. 'Oh! I am so glad you are awake,' said the girl. 'Dear Aunt Sarah, has your sleep done you good? Are you better? Can you listen to something? Can you guess?' And she knelt down so as to bring her face on a level with the other; but she couldn't see it very plainly for a dazzle between them. 'Robert says he loves me; and, indeed, if he loves me I must love him,' Dolly whispered; and her face fell hidden against the pillow, and the mist turned to haze. Some bird in the garden outside began to whistle in its sleep. A belated clock struck something a long way off, and then all was silence and darkness again.

Lady Sarah held Dolly close to her, as the girl knelt beside her. 'Do you care for him? Is it possible?' said Lady Sarah, bewildered.

Dolly was hurt by her doubt. 'Indeed I do,' she answered, beginning to cry once more, from fatigue and excitement.

One of the two women in that midnight room was young, with the new kindling genius of love in her heart, and she was weeping; the other was old, with the first knell of death ringing in her ear; but when Dolly looked up at last she saw that her aunt was smiling very tenderly. Lady Sarah smiled, but she could not trust herself to speak. She had awakened startled, but in a minute she had realised it all. She had felt all along that this must be. She had not wished for it, but it was come. It was not only of Dolly and of Robert that Lady Sarah thought that night; other ghosts came into the room and stood before her. And then came every day, very real, into this dream-world—Marker with a bed-chamber candlestick, walking straight into conflicting emotions, and indignant with Miss Dolly for disturbing her mistress. She had been shutting up and seeing to Mrs. Palmer's coffee. She was scarcely mollified by the great news. Lady Sarah was awake; Dolly had awakened her.

'Let people marry who they like,' said Marker; 'but don't let them come chattering and disturbing at this time o' night, when they should a' known better.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GOOD-MORNING.

Qu'un jeune amour, plein de mystère,
Pardonne à la vieille amitié.

DOLLY passed through the sleeping house, crept by the doors, slid down the creaking stairs, into the hall. The shutters were unopened as yet, the dawning day was bolted out, and the place was dark and scattered over with the shreds of the day before. A newspaper was lying on the hall table, pieces of string upon the ground, a crumpled letter, and the long brown-paper coffin in which the silk for her new gown had come home the night before. Each day scatters its dust as it hurries by, and leaves its broken ends and scraps for the coming hours to collect and sort away, dust of mind, and dust of matter. The great kaleidoscope of the world turns round once in its twenty-four hours; the patterns and combinations shift and change and disperse into new combinations. Perhaps some of us may think that, with each turn, the fragments are shaken up and mixed and broken away more and more, until only an undistinguishable uniform dazzle remains in place of the beautiful blue and red and golden stars and wheels that delighted our youth.

Dorothea gave a cautious pull to the bolt of the outer door and opened it, letting a sudden sweet chill rush of light and fresh air into the closed house, where they had all been asleep through the night. What a morning! All

her sudden fears seemed lightened, and she jumped across the step on to the gravel walk, and looked up and round and about. Dark green, gold, glistening bricks, slanting lights, and sweet tremulous shadows; the many crowding house-roofs and tree-tops aflame in the seven-o'clock sunshine, the birds flapping and fluttering, the mellow old church clock striking seven: the strokes come in solemn procession across the High Street and the old brick-walled garden, and pass on I don't know to what distant blue realms in the vault overhead.

She stopped to look at a couple of snails creeping up among the nails in the wall. I think she then practised a little mazourka along the straight garden walk. She then took off her hat and stopped to pin back some of the russet of which I have spoken, then she looked up again and drew a great breath; and then, passing the green beech and the two cut yew-trees, she came to the placid pond in its stone basin at the end of the garden. There it lay in its darkness and light. There were the gold-fish wide-awake, darting and gaping as they rose to the surface; and the water reflected the sky and the laurel-bushes, and the chipped stone edge of the basin. When Dorothea came and looked over the brink she saw her own smiling, disjointed face looking up at her. It was not so bright a face as her own, somehow. It looked up grey and sad from out of this trembling, mystical looking-glass. What was it? A cloud passing overhead, a little, soft, fleecy, white cloud bobbing along, and then some birds flying by, and then a rustle among the leaves. It was only a moment, during which it had seemed to her as if the throb of nature beat a little more slowly, and as if its rhythm had halted for an instant; and in that moment the trouble of the night before, the doubt of herself, came back to her. Sometimes Dorothea had wondered, as others have done before her, if there is

such a thing as real happiness in nature. Do clouds love to sail quickly on the wind? Are pools glad to lie placid refracting the sunshine? When the trees rustle, is it just a chatter and a quiver, or the thrill of life answering life? The thought of a living nature without consciousness had always seemed to her inexpressibly sad. She had sometimes thought how sad a human life might be that was just a human life, living and working and playing, and coming to an end one day, and falling to the ground. It was, in truth, not very unlike the life she might have led herself, and now —now she was alone no longer. There was a meaning to life now, for Henley loved her. She thought this, and then, seeing a spider's web suddenly gleam with a long lightning flash, she turned with another glad spring of youth to the light.

On the table, lay a letter sealed and stamped and addressed—'Miss Vanborough, Church House, Kensington.' It was for her. There was no mistaking it. Her first love-letter. There it lay in black and in white, signed and dated and marked with a crest. Robert must have written it the night before, after they had left.

A few minutes ago, in the fresh morning air, it had all seemed like a dream of the night; here were tangible signs and wonders to recall her to her allegiance.

Dolly took it up shyly, this first love-letter, come safe into her hands from the hands which had despatched it. She was still standing reading it in the window when Lady Sarah, who had made an effort, came in, leaning on Marker's arm. The girl was absorbed; her pretty brown curly head was bent in the ivylight, that dazzled through the leaves; she heard nothing except the new voice speaking to her; she saw no one except that invisible presence which was so vividly before her. This was the letter:—

My dearest Dora,—I write you one line, which will, I hope, reach you in the morning. You are gone, and already I wish you back again. Your sweet-

ness, your trust in me, have quite overpowered me. I long to prove to you that I am all you believed me, and worthy of your choice. Do not fear to trust your happiness to me. I have carefully studied your character. I know you even better than you know yourself; and when you hesitated I could appreciate your motives. I feel convinced that we have acted for the best. I would say more, but I must write to your mother and to Lady Sarah by to-night's post. Write to me fully and without reserve.

Ever yours, dearest Dora,

R. V. H.

Inside Dolly's letter was a second letter, addressed to the Lady Sarah Francis, sealed and addressed in the same legible hand. This was not a love-letter; nobody could reasonably be expected to send two by the same post:—

My dear Lady Sarah,—Dora will have informed you of what has occurred, and I feel that I must not delay expressing to you how sincerely I trust that you will not disapprove of the step we have taken. Although my appointment is not a very lucrative one, the salary is increasing; and I shall make a point of insuring my life before leaving England, for our dear girl's benefit. I do not know whether Dorothea is herself entitled to any of her father's fortune, or whether it has been settled upon George; perhaps you would kindly inform me upon this point, as I am most anxious not to overstep the line of prudence, and my future arrangements must greatly depend upon my means. You will have heard of my appointment to the presidentship of the College of Boggley-wollah. India is a long way off, but time soon passes to those who are able to make good use of it; and I trust that in the happiness of one so justly dear to you, you will find consolation for her absence.

Believe me, my dear Lady Sarah, very truly yours,

R. Henley.

P.S.—My widow would be entitled to a pension by the provisions of the Fund.

This was what Dolly, with so much agitation, put into her aunt's hand, watching her face anxiously as she read it.

'May I read it?' said Dolly.

'It is only business,' said Lady Sarah, crumpling it up, and Dolly turned away disappointed, and began to pour out the tea.

It was a very agitated breakfast, happy and shy and rather silent, though so much had to be said. Mrs. Palmer

came drifting in, to their surprise, before breakfast was over, in a beautiful white wrapper with satin bows. She also had received a letter. She embraced Dolly and Lady Sarah.

'Well, what do you say to our news, Sarah? I have heard from our dear Robert,' said she. 'You may read his letter—both of you. Sarah, I am sorry to hear you have been ailing. If it would not be giving too much trouble—I have been so upset by all this agitation—I should prefer coffee this morning. I was quite frightened about myself last night, Dolly, after I left you . . . . Dear me, what memories come back to one. Do you remember our marriage, Sarah, and . . . .?'

'Pray ring again, Dolly,' said Lady Sarah, abruptly, and she went to the door and called Marker, shrilly and impatient.

'There is no one but me,' says Mrs. Palmer, pulling out her frills with a deep sigh, 'who cares for those old stories. The Admiral cannot endure them.'

Dolly's cup of happiness, so full before, seemed overflowing now, it spread and spread. Happiness and sorrow overflow into other cups besides our own. John Morgan looked in opportunely to hear the news and to ask how they all were: his hearty congratulations came with a grateful sense of relief. Dolly longed for sympathy in her happiness. She was glad to be a little stunned by the cheerful view he took of what must be so sad as well as so sweet. The news spread rapidly.

Old Sam came up with a shining face and set down the copper coal-scuttle, the better to express his good wishes. Eliza Twells tumbled down the kitchen-stairs with a great clatter from sheer excitement, and when Marker, relenting, came up in her big flowing apron for orders, her round face was rippling with smiles.

'God bless you kindly, Miss Dolly, my dear,' said the good old woman, giving her a kiss on each cheek. 'I never took up with a husband myself, but I don't blame ye. It is well to have some one to speak our mind to. And did he give you a ring, my dear?'

Dolly laughed and held up her two hands. 'No ring, Marker. I don't like rings. I wish one could be married without one.'

'Don't say that, dearie,' said Marker, gravely.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LOVE LANE FROM KENSINGTON TO FULHAM.

Where are the great, whom thou wouldst wish to praise thee?
Where are the pure, whom thou wouldst choose to love thee?
Where are the brave, to stand supreme above thee,
Whose high commands would cheer, whose chiding raise thee?
Seek, seeker, in thyself, submit to find
In the stones bread, and life in the blank mind.

—A. T. Clough.

Robert came up to town on the Tuesday, as he had promised Dolly. As he came along, he told himself that he had deserved some reward for his patience in waiting. He had resisted many a sentimental impulse, not wishing to distract his mind until the summer term was over. He might almost have trusted himself to propose at Easter, and to go on calmly with his papers, for he was not like George, whose wandering attention seemed distracted by every passing emotion. Robert's stiff black face melted a little as he indulged in a lover-like dream. He saw Dolly as she would be one day, ruling his household, welcoming his guests, admired by them all. Henley had too good taste to like a stupid woman. Nothing would ever have induced him to think of a plain one. He wished for a certain amount of good-breeding and habit of the world. . . . All these qualifications he had discovered in his cousin, not to speak of other prospects depending on her aunt's good pleasure.

Old Sam opened the door, grinning his congratulations. Robert found Dolly sitting with her mother on the terrace. Philippa jumped up to meet him, and embraced him too with effusion.

'We were expecting you,' she said. 'I have *much* to say to you; come with me.' And clasping her hands upon his arm, she would have immediately drawn him away into the house, if Robert had not said with some slight embarrassment, 'Presently, my dear aunt, I shall be quite at your service; but I have not yet spoken to Dolly.' Dolly did not move, but waited for Robert to come to her—then she looked up suddenly.

Dolly's manner was charming in those days—a little reserved, but confident and sympathetic, a little abrupt at times, but bright and melancholy at once. Later in life some of its shadows seemed to drown the light in her honest face; her mistakes made her more shy, and more reserved; she caught something of Henley's coldness of manner, and was altered, so her friends thought.

I don't, for my own part, believe that people change. But it is not the less true that they have many things in them, many emotions and passing moods, and as days and feelings follow, each soul's experience is written down here and there, and in other souls, and by signs, and by work done, and by work undone, and by what is forgotten, as well as that which is remembered, by the influence of to-day, and of the past that is not over. Perhaps, one day, we may know ourselves at last, and read our story plainly written in our own and other people's lives.

Dolly, in those days, was young and confident and undismayed. It seems strange to make a merit as we do of youth, of inexperience, of hardness of heart. Her untroubled young spirit had little sympathy for others more weary and wayworn. She loved, but without sympathy; but all the same, the bright-

ness of her youth and its unconscious sweetness spread and warmed, and comforted those upon whom its influence fell.

Dorothea Vanborough was a woman of many-changing emotions and sentiments; frank to herself, doubting herself all the while; diffident where she should have been bold, loving the right above all things, and from very excess of scruples, troubled at times, and hard to others. Then came regret and self-abasement and reproach, how bitter none can tell but those who, like her, have suffered from many and complicated emotions—trusting, mistrusting, longing for truth, and, from this very longing, failing often. She loved because she was young and her heart was tender and humble. She doubted because she was young and because the truth was in her, urging her to do that which she would not have done, and to feel the things that she would not have felt. But all this was only revealed to her later, only it was there from the beginning. Dolly was very shy and very happy all these early days.

Frank Raban thought Dolly careless, hard in her judgments, spoiled by the love that was showered upon her; he thought she was not kind to Rhoda. All this he dwelt upon, nor could he forget her judgment upon himself. Poor Raban acknowledged that for him no judgment could be too severe, and yet he would have loved Dolly to be pitiful; although she could now never be anything to him—never, so long as they both lived. When the news came of her engagement, it was a pain to him that he had long expected, and that he accepted. One failure in life was enough. He made no advance; he watched her; he let her go, foolish man! without a word. Sometimes Rhoda would talk to him about Dolly. Frank always listened.

'She does not mean to be cold. Indeed, I don't think so—I am so used to her manner that I do not think of it,' Rhoda would say. 'Dear Dolly is full of good and generous

impulses. She will make Robert Henley a noble wife if he only gives in to her in everything. I would I were half as good as she is; but she is a little hasty at times, and wants every one to do as she tells them.'

'And you do as everybody tells you,' said Raban.

And to do Rhoda justice, she worked her fingers to the bone, she walked to poor people's houses through the rain and mud; she was always good-tempered, she was a valuable inmate in the household. Zoe said she couldn't think how Rhoda got through half what she did. 'Here, there, and everywhere,' says Zoe, in an aggrieved voice, 'before I have time to turn.'

Notwithstanding the engagement, the little household at Church House went its usual course. Lady Sarah had followed her own beaten ways so long, that she seemed, from habit, to travel on whether or not her interest went with her. Those old days are almost forgotten now, even by the people who lived in them. With a strange, present thrill Dolly remembers sometimes, as she passes through the old haunts of her early youth, a past instant of time, a past state of sentiment, as bygone as the hour to which it belonged. Passing by the old busy corner of the church not long ago, Dolly remembered how she and Robert had met Raban there one day, just after their news had been made public. He tried to avoid them, then changed his mind and came straight up and shook hands, uttering his good wishes in a cold, odd manner, that Dolly thought almost unkind.

'I am afraid my good wishes can add little to your happiness, but I congratulate you,' he said to Robert; 'and I wish you all happiness,' he said to Dolly; and then they were all silent for a minute.

'You will come soon, won't you?' said Dolly, shyly.

'Good-by,' said Frank Raban, walking away very quickly.

He had meant to keep away, but he came just as usual to Church House, and was there even more constantly. Lady Sarah was glad of his companionship for George, who seemed in a very strange and excited state of mind.

The summer of '54 was an eventful summer; and while Dolly was living in her own youthful world, concentrated in the overwhelming interests that had come of late, in old and the new ties, so hard to grasp, so hard to loose, armies were marching, fleets were sailing, politicians and emperors were pondering upon the great catastrophe that seemed imminent. War had been declared; with it the great fleets had come speeding across the sea from one horizon to another. The events of the day only reached Dolly in echoes from a long way off, brought by Robert and by George, printed in the paper. Robert was no keen politician. He was too full of his own new plans and new career. George was far more excited, and of a more fiery temper. Frank Raban and George and he used to have long and angry arguments. Raban maintained that the whole thing was a mistake, a surrender to popular outcry. George and Robert were for fighting at any price: for once they agreed.

'I don't see,' said George, 'what there is in life to make it so preferable to anything else, to every sense of honour and of consideration, of liberty of action. Life, to be worth anything, is only a combination of all these things; and for one or any of them I think a man should be willing to play his stake.'

'Of course, of course, if it were necessary,' said Henley, 'one would do what was expected of one. There is my cousin, Jonah Henley, joining his regiment next week. I confess it is on different grounds from you that I approve of this war. I do not like to see England falling in the—a—estimation of Europe: we can afford to go to war. Russia's pretensions are intolerable; and, with France to assist us, I

believe the Government is thoroughly justified in the course it is pursuing.'

'I don't think we are ready,' said Raban, in his odd, constrained voice. 'I don't think we *are* justified. We sit at home and write heroic newspaper articles, and we send out poor fellows by rank and by file to be pounded at and cut to mincemeat, for what? Suppose we put things back a hundred years, what good shall we have done?'

'But think of our Overland Route,' said Henley; 'suppose the future should interfere with the P. and O.'

There were green lanes in those days leading from the far end of that lane in which Church House was built to others that crossed a wide and spreading country: it is not even yet quite overflooded by the waves of brick—that tide that flows out in long, strange furrows, and never ebbs away. Dolly and Henley went wandering along these lanes one fine afternoon; they were going they knew not where; into a land of Canaan, so Dolly thought it: green cabbages, a long, gleaming canal, hawthorn hedges, and a great overarched sky that began to turn red when the sun set. Now and then they came to some old house that had outstood storms and years, fluttering signals of distress in the shape of old shirts and clothes hung out to dry; in the distance rose Kensington spires and steeples; now and then a workman trudged by on his way home; distant bells rang in this wide, desolate country. Women come tramping home from their long day's work in the fields, and look hard at the handsome young couple, Dolly with cast-down eyes, Robert with his nose up in the air. The women trudge wearily home; the young folks walk step by step into life. The birds cross the sky in a sudden flight; the cabbages grow where they are planted.

They missed the Chelsea Lane. Dolly should have

known the way, but she was absorbed and unobservant, and those cross-ways were a labyrinth except for those who were well used to them. They found themselves presently in the Old Brompton Road, with its elm-trees and old gable roofs darkening against the sunset. How sweet it was, with red lights burning, people slowly straggling like themselves, and enjoying the gentle ease of the twilight and of the soft west wind. Dolly led Henley back by the old winding road, with its bends and fancies; its cottages, within close-built walls; and stately old houses, with iron scroll-work on their garden gates, and gardens not yet destroyed. Then they came to a rueful row of bricks and staring windows. A young couple stood side by side against the low rail in front of their home. Dolly remembered this afterwards; for the sky was very splendid just then, and the young woman's violet dress seemed to blaze with the beautiful light, as she stood in her quaint little garden, looking out across the road to the well-remembered pond and some fields beyond. Along the distant line of the plains great soft ships of vapour were floating; the windows of the distant houses flashed; the pond looked all splendid and sombre in its shady corner. The evening seemed vast and sweet, and Dolly's heart was full.

'Are you tired?' said Robert, seeing that she lingered.

'Tired? no,' said Dorothea. 'I was looking at the sky, and wondering how it would have been if you had gone away and never ——?' She stopped.

'Why think about it?' said Robert. 'You would have married somebody else, I suppose.'

He said it in a matter-of-fact sort of way, and for a moment Dolly's eyebrows seemed to darken over her eyes. It was a mere nothing, the passing shadow of a thought.

'You are right,' said Dolly, wistfully. 'It is no use thinking how unhappy one might have been. Have you

ever been very unhappy, Robert?' Now that she was so happy, Dolly seemed, for the first time, to realise what sorrow might be.

'A certain young lady made me very unhappy one day not long ago,' said Robert, 'when she tried to freeze me up with a snowball.'

This was not what Dolly meant: she was in earnest, and he answered her with a joke; she wanted a sign, and no sign was given to her.

They had just reached home, when Robert said, with his hand on the bell: 'This has not been unhappy, has it, Dolly? We shall have a great many more walks together when I can spare the time. But you must talk to me more, and not be so shy, dearest.'

Something flew by as he spoke, and went fluttering into the ivy.

'That was a bat,' said Dolly, shrinking, while Robert stood shaking his umbrella-stick among the ivy leaves; but it was too dark to see anything distinctly.

'I hope,' said Robert, sentimentally, 'to come and see you constantly when this term is over. Then we shall know more of each other, Dora.'

'Don't we know each other?' asked Dolly, with one of her quick glances; 'I think I know you quite well, Robert —better than I know myself almost,' she added, with a sigh.

When they came into the drawing-room the lamp was alight, and George and Rhoda were there with Lady Sarah. George was talking at the very pitch of his melancholy voice, Lady Sarah was listening with a pale, fixed face, like a person who has made up her mind.

Rhoda was twirling her work round and round her fingers. She had broken the wool, and dropped the stitches. It was by a strong effort that she sat so still.

'Here is George announcing his intentions,' said Lady

Sarah, as they came in. 'Perhaps you, Robert, will be able to preach good sense to him.'

'Oh, Aunt Sarah!' Dolly cried, springing forward, 'at last he has told you. . . . Has Rhoda?' Dolly's two hands were clasped in excitement. Lady Sarah looked at her in some surprise.

There was a crash, a scream from Rhoda. The flower-glass had gone over on the table beside her, and all the water was running about over the carpet.

'My dress—my Sunday best!' cried Rhoda. 'Lady Sarah, I am so sorry.'

Dolly bent over to pick up the table, and, as she did so, Rhoda whispered, 'Be silent, or you will ruin George.'

'Ruined?' said Robert. 'Your dress is not ruined, Rhoda. I speak from experience, for I wear a silk gown myself.'

'George says he will not take my living,' said Lady Sarah. 'He wishes to be —— What do you wish to be, George?'

George, somewhat confused, said he wished to be a soldier —anything but a clergyman.

'You don't mean to say you are going to be such a — that you refuse seven hundred a year?' said Henley, stopping short.

'Confound it!' cried George, 'can't you all leave a poor fellow in peace?' And he burst out of the room.

'Come here, Dolly,' said Mrs. Palmer, from a distant corner of the room; 'make this foolish darling do as his aunt wishes. I am sure the Admiral would quite feel as I do.'

'Seven hundred a year,' said Lady Sarah. 'Wretched boy! I shall sell the presentation.'

'Oh, Robert!' said Dolly, 'he is right if he can't make up his mind. I know Aunt Sarah thinks so.'

Dolly could not help being vexed with Robert. He shrugged his shoulders, said that George would regret his decision, and went on to talk of various plans that he himself had at heart, just as if George had never existed.

'I want you to trust Dolly to me for a few days,' said he. 'I want to take her down to Smokethwaite with my aunt. She must see Jonah before he leaves. They all write, and urge her coming.'

Lady Sarah agreed, with a sigh, and her eyes filled with tears. She turned away abruptly to hide them.

Many and many were the tears she wiped away, for fear Dolly should see them. George's whole body was not so dear to her as Dolly's little finger. She blamed herself in vain afterwards, when it was too late. Sometimes she could hardly bear to see her niece come into the room with her smiling face, and she scarcely answered when the sweet girl's voice came echoing and calling about the house. Could it be true that it was going, that sweet voice? Laughing, scolding, chattering, hour by hour—were the many footsteps going, too, and the rustle of her dress, and the look of her happy eyes? was the time already come for Dolly to fly away from the old nest that had sheltered her for so short a time? She seemed scarcely to have come—scarcely to have begun her sweet home song—and already she was eager to go!

But Rhoda had come up, looking very pale, to say good-night. As she said good-by, Dolly followed her out, and tried to put in some little word for George. 'Rhoda, he has been true to himself,' she whispered; 'that is best of all—is not it?'

'Let him be true to himself, by all means,' said Rhoda.

She was thoroughly out of temper. Dolly had not improved matters by talking about them. George came out of the oak room prepared to walk back with her. 'No,

thank you,' said Rhoda, trembling very much. 'I won't trouble you to come home with me.'

She was tying her bonnet and pinning on her shawl in an agitated way. George watched her in silence. When she was ready to go, he held out his hand. 'Good-night,' he said.

'Good-night,' said Rhoda, hurrying off without looking up, and passing out into the street.

It was unbearable. If George loved her he might do as she wished. But he would sacrifice nothing—not one fancy. Her Uncle John was a clergyman. It was a very high calling. Rhoda thought of the pretty little parsonage-house, and the church, and the cottages all round about, only waiting to be done good to, while the apples were baking on the trees and cakes in the oven, all of which good things George had refused—George, who did not know one bit what he was doing, nor what it was to scrape, and starve, and live with dull, stinted, scraping people. She was quite tired of it all. It was not a real life that she led; it was a housekeeper's situation, just like Aunt Morgan. She had done her best, and she had earned a rest, and she would not begin all over again. George might be as true as he liked. Rhoda ran up the steps of the old brown house in a silent passion, and gave a sharp pull at the bell. Yes, she hated it all. She was utterly tired of it all—of the noisy home, of Aunt Morgan's precepts and flannels. She could hear the clink of plates in the dining-room, where the inevitable anters of cheese and cold meat were set out on the shabby table-cloth, where her Aunt Morgan stood in her black cap and stiff brown curls, carving slice after slice for the hungry curate. 'You are late, Rhoda,' said her aunt. 'I suppose you stayed to late dinner with your friends?'

'No; but I am not hungry,' said Rhoda, shrinking away.

'Why, Rhoda, what is the matter?' said John, kindly, and he held out his big hand to her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNBORN TO-MORROW AND DEAD YESTERDAY.

Alas, thrice-gentle Cassio,
My advocation is not now in tune;
My lord is not my lord; nor should I know him,
Were he in favour, as in humour, alter'd.
—Othello.

Whatever Lady Sarah may have thought, Mrs. Palmer used to consider Dolly a most fortunate girl, and she used to say so, not a little to Lady Sarah's annoyance.

'Extremely fortunate,' repeats Dolly's mamma, looking thoughtfully at her fat satin shoes. 'What a lottery life is! I was as pretty as Dolly, and yet dear Stanham had not anything like Robert's excellent prospects. Even the Ad—— Don't go, Sarah.'

Poor Lady Sarah would start up, with an impatient movement, and walk across the room to get away from Philippa's retrospections. They were almost more than she had patience for just then. She could scarcely have found patience for Philippa herself, if it had not been that she was Dolly's mother. What did she mean by her purrings and self-congratulations? Lady Sarah used to feel most doubtful about Dolly's good fortune just when Philippa was most enthusiastic on the subject, or when Robert himself was pointing out his excellent prospects in his lucid way.

Philippa would listen, nodding languid approbation. Dolly would make believe to laugh at Robert's accounts of his coming honours; but it was easy to see that it was only make-believe incredulity.

Her aunt could read the girl's sweet conviction in her eyes, and she loved her for it. Once, remembering her own youth, this fantastic woman had made a vow never, so long as she lived, to interfere in the course of true love. True love! Is this true love, when one person is in love with a phantom, another with an image reflected in a glass? True love is something more than phantoms, than images and shadows; and yet stirred by phantoms and living among shadows, its faint dreams come to life.

Lady Sarah was standing by the bookcase, in a sort of zigzag mind of her own old times and of Dolly's to-day. She had taken a book from the shelf—a dusty volume of Burns's poems—upon the fly-leaf of which the name of another Robert Henley was written. She holds the book in her hand, looks at the crooked writing—'S. V., from Robert Henley, May, 1808.' She beats the two dusty covers together, and puts it back into its place again. That is all her story. Philippa never heard of it, Robert never heard of it, nor did he know that Lady Sarah loved his name—which had been his father's too—better than she loved him. 'Perhaps her happiness had all gone to Dolly,' the widow thought, as she stood, with a troubled sort of smile on her face, looking at the two young people through a pane of glass; and then, like a good woman as she is, tries to silence her misgivings into a little prayer for their happiness.

Let us do justice to the reluctant prayers that people offer up. They are not the less true because they are half-hearted and because those who pray would sometimes gladly be spared an answer to their petitions. Poor Lady Sarah!

her prayers seemed too much answered as she watched Dolly day by day more and more radiant and absorbed.

'My dear creature, what are you doing with all those dusty books? Can you see our young people?' says Mrs. Palmer, languidly looking over her arm-chair. 'I expect Colonel Witherington this afternoon. He admires Dolly excessively, Sarah; and I really think he might have proposed, if Robert had not been so determined to carry her off. You dear old thing, forgive me; I don't believe she would ever have married at all if I had not come home. You are in the clouds, you know. I remember saying so to Hawtry at Trincomalee. I should have disowned her if she had turned out an old maid. I know it. I detest old maids. The Admiral has a perfect craze for them, and they all adore him. I should like you to see Miss M'Grudder—there never was anything so ludicrous, asthmatic, sentimental—frantic. We must introduce Miss Moineaux to him, and the Morgan girls. I often wonder how he ever came to marry a widow, and I tell him so. It was a great mistake. Can you believe it?—Hawtry now writes that second marriages are no marriages at all. Perhaps you agree with him? I'm sure Dolly is quite ready to do so. I never saw a girl so changed—*never*. We have lost her, my dear; make up your mind to it. She is Robert, not Dolly any more—no thought for any one else, not for *me*, dear child! And don't you flatter yourself she will ever . . . Dear me! Gone? What an extraordinary creature poor Sarah is! touched, certainly; and *such* a wet blanket!'

Mrs. Palmer, rising from her corner, floats across the room, sweeping over several footstools and small tables on her way. She goes to the window, and not caring to be alone, begins to tap with her diamond finger upon the pane, to summon the young couple, who pay not the slightest attention. Fortunately the door opens, and Colonel

Witherington is announced. He is a swarthy man, with shiny boots, a black moustache; his handkerchief is scented with Esse-bouquet, which immediately permeates the room; he wears tight dogskin gloves and military shirt-collars. Lady Sarah thinks him vulgar and odious beyond words; Mrs. Palmer is charmed to see him, and graciously holds out her white hand. She is used to his adoration, and accepts it with a certain swan-like indifference.

People had different opinions about Mrs. Palmer. In some circles she was considered brilliant and accomplished; in others, silly and affected. Colonel Witherington never spoke of her except with military honours. 'Charming woman,' he would say; 'highly cultivated; you might give her five-and-twenty at the outside. Utterly lost upon that spluttering, old psalm-singing Palmer. Psalms are all very well in their *proper* place—in the prayer-books, or in church; but after dinner, when one has got a good cigar, and feels inclined for a little pleasant conversation, it is *not* the time to ring the bell for the servants, and have 'em down upon their knees all of a row, and up again in five minutes to listen to an extempore sermon. The Admiral runs on like a clock. I used to stay with them at the Admiralty House. Pity that poor woman most heartily! Can't think how she keeps up as she does!'

Little brown Lady Henley at Smokethwaite would not have sympathised with Colonel Witherington's admiration. She made a point of shrugging her shoulders whenever she heard Philippa's name mentioned. 'If you ask me,' she would say, 'I must frankly own that my sister-in-law is not to be depended on. She is utterly selfish; she only lives for the admiration of gentlemen. My brother Hawtry is a warm-hearted, impulsive man, who would have made any woman happy. If he *has* looked for consolation in his domestic trials, and found it in religious interests, it is not

I who would blame him. Sir Thomas feels as I do, and deeply regrets Philippa's deplorable frivolity. I do not know much of that poor girl of hers. I have no doubt Robert has been dazzled by mother and daughter. They are good-looking, and, as I am told, thoroughly well understand the art of setting themselves off to the best advantage. I am fond of Robert Henley; but I cannot pretend to have any feeling for Dorothea one way or another. We have asked them here, of course. They are to come after their marriage. I only hope my sister-in-law appreciates her daughter's good luck, and has the sense to know the value of such a man as Robert Henley.'

Mrs. Palmer was perfectly enchanted with her future son-in-law. He could scarcely get rid of her. Robert, with some discomposure, would find himself sitting on his aunt's sofa, hand-in-hand, listening to long and very unpleasant extracts from her correspondence. 'You dear boy!' Mrs. Palmer would say, with her soft, fat fingers firmly clasped round his; 'you have done me good. Your dear head is able to advise my poor perplexed heart. Dolly, he is my prop. I give you up, my child, gladly, to this dear fellow!' These little compliments mollified the young man at first, although he found that by degrees the tax of his aunt's constant dependence became heavier and heavier. Briareus himself could scarcely have supplied arms to support her unsparing weakness, to hand her parcels and footstools about, to carry her shawls and cushions, and to sort the packets of her correspondence. She had the Admiral's letters, tied up with various-coloured ribbons, and docketed, 'Cruel,' 'Moderately Abusive,' 'Apologetic,' 'Canting,' 'Business.' She was always sending for Robert. Her playful tap at the window made him feel quite nervous.

Mrs. Palmer had begun to knit him a pair of muffetees, and used slowly to twist pink silk round ivory needles.

Lady Henley laughed very loud when she heard this. 'Poor Robert! He will have to pay dearly for those mittens,' she said.

For a long time past Mrs. Palmer had rarely left the house, but the trousseau now began to absorb her; she used to go driving for long hours at a time with Dolly, in a jaded fly—she would invite Robert to accompany them—to Baker Street Bazaar, to Soho Square, to St. Paul's Churchyard, back again to Oxford Street, a corner shop of which she had forgotten the number. On one occasion, after trying three or four corner shops, Robert called to the coachman to stop, and jumped out. 'I think Dolly and I will walk home,' he said, abruptly; 'I'm afraid you must give up your shop, Aunt Philippa. It is impossible to find the place.'

Poor Dolly, who was longing to escape, brightened up, but before she could speak, Mrs. Palmer had grasped her tightly by both hands. 'My dear Robert, what a proposal! I could not *think* of letting Dolly walk all the way home. She would be *quite* done up. And it is *her* business, her shopping, you know.' Then reproachfully and archly, 'And I *must* say that even the Admiral would scarcely have deserted us so ungallantly, with all this work on our hands, and all these parcels, and no servant. You dear fellow, you really must not leave us.'

Robert stood holding the door open, and looking particularly black. 'I am very sorry indeed,' he said, with a short laugh, 'but you will be quite safe, my dear aunt, and you really seem to have done enough shopping to last for many years to come.' And he put out his hand as a matter of course, to help Dorothea to alight.

'But she *cannot* leave me,' says Philippa, excitedly; 'she would not even wish it. Would you, my child? I never drive alone—never; I am afraid of the coachman. It is most unreasonable to propose such a thing.'

'I will answer for your safety,' persisted Robert. 'My dear aunt, you must get used to doing without your Dolly now. Come, Dora, the walk will freshen you up.'

'But I don't want to walk, Robert,' said poor Dolly, with a glance at her mother. 'You may come for me to-morrow instead. You will, won't you?' she added, as he suddenly turned away without answering, and she leant out of the carriage-window, and called after him, a little frightened by his black looks and silence. 'Robert! I shall expect you,' she said.

'I shall not be able to come to-morrow, Dora,' said Henley, very gravely; and then, raising his hat, he walked off without another word.

Even then Dolly could not believe that he was seriously angry. She saw him striding along the pavement, and called to him, and made a friendly little sign with her hand as the brougham passed close by a place where he was waiting to cross the road. Robert did not seem to see either the brougham nor the kind face inside that was smiling at him. Dorothea's eyes suddenly filled up with tears.

'Boorish! Boorish!' cried Mrs. Palmer, putting up both hands. 'Robert is like all other men, they leave you at any moment, Dolly—that is my experience,—bitterly gained—without a servant even, and I have ever so much more to do. There is Parkins and Gotto's for India-paper. If only I had known that he was going to be so rude, I should have asked for old Sam.' Mrs. Palmer was still greatly discomposed. 'Pray put up that window, Dolly,' she said, 'and I do wish you would attend to those parcels—they are falling off the seat.'

Dolly managed to wink away her tears as she bent over the parcels. Forgive her for crying! This was her first quarrel with Robert, if quarrel it could be called. She

thought it over all the way home, surely she had been right to do as her mother wished—why was Robert vexed?

Philippa was in a very bad humour all that evening. She talked so pathetically of a mother's feelings, and of the pangs of parting from her child, that Lady Sarah for once was quite sorry for her—she got a little shawl to put over Philippa's feet as she lay beating a tattoo upon the sofa. As for Dolly, she had gone to bed early, very silent and out of spirits.

That evening's post brought a couple of letters; one was from George to his mother, written in his cranky, blotted handwriting:—

Cambridge: All Saints' College.

DEAREST MAMMA,—I am coming up for a couple of days. I have, strange as it may sound, been working too hard. Tell Aunt Sarah. Love to Dolly.

Yours affectionately,

GEORGE.

The other was for Dolly, and Marker took it up to her in her room. This letter flowed in even streams of black upon the finest hot-pressed paper:

DEAREST DORA,—I was much disappointed that you would not come with me, and condemned me to that solitary walk. I hope that a day may come, before very long, when your duty and your pleasures may seem less at variance to you than at present; otherwise I can see little chance of happiness in our future life.

Yours,

R. V. H.

'Was he still vexed?' Dolly, who had relented the moment she saw the handwriting, wrote him a little note that evening, by moonlight, and asked Marker to post it.

I could not leave Mamma all alone (she wrote). I wanted to walk home with you—couldn't you see that I did? I shall expect you to come to luncheon to-morrow, and we will go wherever you like.—D.

Dolly lay awake after this for a long moonlight hour. She was living in what people call the world of feeling. She was absorbed, she was happy, but it was a happiness with a reserve in it. It was peace indeed, but Dolly was too young, her life had been too easy, for peace to be all-sufficient to her. She had found out, by her new experience, that Robert loved her, but in future that he would rule her too. In her life, so free hitherto, there would be this secret rule to be obeyed, this secret sign. Dolly did not know whether on the whole she liked the thought, or whether she resented it. She had never spoken of it, even to Robert. 'You see you have to do as you are told,' Henley sometimes said; he meant it in fun, but Dorothea instinctively felt that there was truth in his words—he was a man who held his own. He was not to be changed by an impulse. Dolly, conscious of some hidden weakness in her own nature, deified obstinacy, as many a woman has done before her, and made excuses out of her own loving heart for Henley's selfish one.

It was summer still, though August had come again; the Virginian creepers along the west wall glowed; crimson-tinted leaves fell in golden rain, the gardener swept up golden dollars and fairy money into heaps and carted them away; the geraniums put out shoots; the creepers started off upon excursions along the gravel-paths: it was a comfortable old-fashioned world, deep-coloured, russet-tinted, but the sun was hot still and burning, and Dolly dressed herself in white, and listened to every bell.

The day passed, however, without any sign of Robert, or any word from him. But George walked in just as they were sitting down to luncheon. He looked very pale and yellow, and he had black lines under his eyes. He had been staying down at Cambridge, actually reading for a scholarship that Raban had advised his trying for. It was called the

Bulbul scholarship for Oriental languages, and it had been founded by an enlightened Parsee, who had travelled in Europe in shiny boots and an oilskin hat, and who had been so well received at Cambridge that he wished to perpetuate his name there.

George had taken up Persian some time ago, when he should have been reading mathematics. He was fond of quoting the 'Roubaiyát' of Omar Khayyam, of which the beautiful English version had lately appeared. It was this poem, indeed, which had set him to study the original. He had a turn for languages, and a fair chance of success, Raban said, if he would only go to bed, and not sit up all night, with soda-water and wet towels round his head. This time he had nearly made himself ill, by sitting up three nights in succession, and the doctor had him sent home for a holiday.

'My dear child, what a state your complexion is in! How ill you look!' said his mother. 'It is all those horrid examinations!'

Restless George wandered out into the garden after dinner, and Dolly followed him. She began to water her roses in the cool of the evening, and George filled the cans with water from the tank and brought them to her. Splashing and overflowing, the water lapped into the dry earth and washed the baked stems of the rose-trees. George said suddenly, 'Dolly, do you ever see Raban now, and do you still snub him?'

'I don't snub him,' said Dolly, blushing. 'He does not approve of me, George. He is so bitter, and he never seems satisfied.'

George began to recite—

> 'Ah, love! could you and I with fate conspire
> To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
> Would we not shatter it to bits, and then
> Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire?

There is Robert at last, Dolly.'

Dolly looked wonderingly at her brother. He had spoken so pointedly, that she could not help wondering what he meant; but the next moment she had sprung forward to meet Henley, with a sweet face alight.

'Oh, Robert, why have you been so long coming?' she said. 'Did you not get my note?'

CHAPTER XXIX.

UNDER THE GREAT DOME.

Fantasio—'Je n'en suis pas, je n'en suis pas.'
—A. DE MUSSET.

THE wedding was fixed for the middle of September. In October they were to sail.

Dolly was to be married at the Kensington parish church. Only yesterday the brown church was standing—to-day a white phœnix is rising from its ashes. The old people and the old prayers seem to be passing away with the brown walls. One wonders as one looks at the rising arches what new tides of feeling will sweep beneath them, what new teachings and petitions, what more instant charity, what more practical faith and hope. One would be well content to see the old gates fall if one might deem that these new ones were no longer to be confined by bolts of human adaptation, against which, day by day, the divine decrees of mutation and progress strike with blows that are vibrating through the aisles, drowning the voice of the teachers, jarring with the prayers of the faithful.

As the doors open wide, the congregations of this practical age in the eternity of ages, see on the altars of to-day new visions of the time. Unlike those of the fervent and mystical past, when kneeling anchorites beheld, in answer to their longing prayers, pitiful saints crowned with roses and radiant with light, and vanishing away, visions of hearts on

fire and the sacred stigmata, the rewards of their life-long penance; to-day, the Brother whom we have seen appears to us in the place of symbols of that which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive. The teaching of the Teacher, as we understand it now, is translated into a new language of daily toil and human sympathy; our saints are the sinners helped out of the mire; our visions do not vanish; our heavenly music comes to us in the voices of the school-children; surely it is as sweet as any that ever reached the enraptured ears of penitents in their cells.

If people are no longer on their knees as they once were, and if some are afraid and cry out that the divine images of our faith are waxing dimmer in their niches; if in the Calvaries of these modern times we still see truth blasphemed, thieves waiting on their crosses of ignorance and crime, sick people crying for help, and children weeping bitterly, why should we be afraid if people, rising from their knees, are setting to their day's work with honest and loving hearts, and going, instead of saying, 'I go,' and remaining and crying, 'Lord, Lord.'

Once Dolly stopped to look at the gates as she was walking by, thinking, not of Church reform, in those old selfish days of hers, but of the new life that was so soon to begin for her behind those baize doors, among the worm-eaten pews and the marble cherubs, under the window, with all the leaden-patched panes diverging. She looked, flushed up, gathered her grey skirts out of the mud, and went on with her companion.

The old days were still going on, and she was the old Dolly that she was used to. But there was this difference now. At any time, at any hour, coming into a room suddenly she never knew but that she might find a letter, a summons, some sign of the new existence, and interests that were crowding upon her. She scarcely believed in it all at

times; but she was satisfied. She was walking with her hand on Robert's strong arm. She could trust to Robert —she could trust herself. She sometimes wondered to find herself so calm. Robert assured her that, when people *really* loved each other, it was always so; they were always calm, and, no doubt, he was right.

The two were walking along the Sunday street on their way to St. Paul's. Family groups and prayer-books were about; market-carts, packed with smiles and ribbons, were driving out in a long train towards the river. Bells far and near were ringing fitfully. There is no mistaking the day as it comes round, bringing with it a little ease into the strain of life, a thought of peace and home-meeting and rest, and the echo of a psalm outside in the City streets, as well as within its churches.

Robert called a hansom, and they drove rapidly along the road towards town. The drifting clouds and lights across the parks and streets made them look changed from their usual aspect. As they left the suburbs and drove on towards the City, Henley laughed at Dorothea's enthusiasm for the wet streets, of which the muddy stones were reflecting the lights of a torn and stormy sky. St. Clement's spire rose sharp against a cloud, the river rolled, fresh blown by soft winds, towards the east, while the lights fell upon the crowding house-tops and spires. Dolly thought of her moonlight drive with her mother. Now, everything was alight and awake again; she alone was dreaming, perhaps. As they went up a steep crowded hill the horse's feet slipped at every step. 'Don't be afraid, Dora,' said Robert, protectingly. Then they were driving up a straiter and wider street, flooded with this same strange light, and they suddenly saw a solemn sight; of domes and spires uprearing; of mist, of stormy sky. There rose the mighty curve, majestically flung against the dome of domes! The mists drifting among these moun-

tains and pinnacles of stone only seemed to make them more stately.

'Robert, I never knew how beautiful it was,' said Dolly. 'How glad I am we came! Look at that great dome and the shining sky. It is like—"see how high the heavens are in comparison with the earth!"'

'I forget the exact height,' said Robert. 'It is between three and four hundred feet. You see the ball up at the top—they say that twenty-four people ——'

'I know all that, Robert,' said Dolly, impatiently. 'What does it matter?'

'I thought it might interest you,' said Robert, slightly huffed, 'since you appear to be so little acquainted with St. Paul's. It is very fine, of course; but I myself have the bad taste to prefer Gothic architecture; it is far more suitable to our church. There is something painfully—how shall I express it?—paganish about these capitals and pilasters.'

'But that is just what I mean,' said Dolly, looking him full in the face. 'Think of the beautiful old thoughts of the Pagans helping to pile up a Cathedral here now. Don't you think,' she said, hesitating, and blushing at her own boldness, 'that it is like a voice from a long way off coming and harmonising now with ours? Robert, imagine building a curve that will make some one happy thousands of years afterwards. . . .'

'I am glad it makes *you* happy, my dear Dorothea. I tell you I have the bad taste not to admire St. Paul's,' Robert repeated; 'but here is the rain, we had better make haste.'

They had come to an opening in the iron railings by this time, and Robert led the way—a stately figure—climbing the long flight of weather-worn steps that go circling to the peristyle. Dolly followed slowly: as she ascended, the lights seemed to uprise, the columns to stand out more boldly.

'Come in,' Robert said, lifting up the heavy leather curtain.

Dolly gave one look at the city at her feet, flashing with the many lights and shadows of the impending storm, and then she followed him into the great Cathedral.

They were late. The evening service was already begun, and a voice was chanting and ringing from column to column. 'Rejoice in the Lord alway,' it sang, 'and again I say, again I say unto you, rejoice! rejoice!' A number of people were standing round a grating, listening to the voice, but an old verger, pleased with the looks of the two young people, beckoned to them and showed them up a narrow stair into a little oaken gallery, whence they could look down upon the echoing voice and the great crowd of people listening to it; many lights were burning, for it was already dark within the building. Here a light fell, there the shadow threw some curve into sudden relief; the rolling mist that hung beyond the distant aisles and over the heads seemed like a veil, and added to the mystery. The music, the fire, the arches overhead, made Dolly's heart throb. The Cathedral itself seemed like a great holy heart beating in the midst of the city. Once, when Dolly was a child in the green ditch, her heart had overflowed with happiness and gratitude; here she was a woman, and the future had not failed her—here were love and faith to make her life complete—all the vibration of fire and music, and the flow of harmonious lines, to express what was beyond words. . . .

'Oh! Robert, what have we done to be so happy?' she whispered, when the service was over and they were coming away in the crowd. 'It almost frightens me,' the girl said.

Robert did not hear her at first; he was looking over the people's heads, for the clouds had come down, and the rain was falling heavily.

'Frighten you,' said Robert presently, opening his um-

brella; 'take my arm, Dolly; what is there to frighten you? I don't suppose we are any happier than other people under the same circumstances. Come this way; let us get out of the crowd.'

Robert led the girl down a narrow lane closed by an iron gate. It looked dark and indistinct, although the west still shone with changing lights. Dolly stood up under a doorway, while the young man walked away down the wet flags to look for a cab to take them home. The rain fell upon the pavement, upon the stone steps where Dolly was standing, and with fresh cheeks blooming in the mist, and eyes still alight with the radiance and beauty of the psalm she had been singing in her heart. 'I don't suppose we are any happier than other people.' She wished Robert had not said that, it seemed cold, ungrateful almost. The psalm in her ears began to die away to the dull patter of the rain as it fell. What was it that came to Dolly as she stood in the twilight of the doorway—a sudden chill coming she knew not from whence—some one light put out on the altar?

Dolly, strung to some high quivering pitch, felt a sudden terror. It was nothing; a doubt of a doubt—a fear of a terror—fearing what—doubting whom?

'The service was very well performed,' said Robert, coming up. 'I have got you a cab.' He helped her in, and then, as he seated himself beside her, began again: 'We shall not have many more opportunities of attending the Cathedral service before we start.'

Dolly was very silent; Robert talked on. He wondered at her seeming want of interest, and yet he had only talked to her about her plans and things that she must have cared to hear. 'I shall know definitely about our start to-morrow, or the day after,' he said, as the cab drew up at the door of Church House. Poor Dolly! She let him go into the drawing-room alone, and ran up to her own little nest

upstairs. The thought of the possible nearness of her departure had suddenly overwhelmed her. When it was still far off she had never thought about it. Now she sat down on the low window-sill, leant her head against the shutter, and watched the last light die out above the ivy wall. The garden shadows thickened; the night gathered slowly; Dolly's heart beat sadly, oh! how sadly. What hopeless feeling was this that kept coming over her again and again? coming she knew not from what recesses of the empty room, from behind the fleeting clouds, from the secret chambers of her traitorous heart? The voice did not cease persecuting. 'So much of you that lives now,' it said, 'will die when you merge your life into Robert's. So much love will be more than he will want. He takes but a part of what you have to give.' The voice was so distinct that she wondered whether Marker, who came in to put away her things, would hear it. Did she love Robert? Of course she loved him. There was his ring upon her finger. She could hear his voice sounding from the hall below. . . . Were they not going off alone together to a lonely life, across a tempestuous sea? For a moment she stood lost, and forgetting that her feet were still upon the home-hearth and that the far-off sea was still beating upon distant shores. Then she started up impatiently, she would not listen any more. With a push to the door she shut her doubts up in the cupboard where she was used to hang her cloak, and then she came slowly down the wooden stairs to the oak-room below.

Dolly found a candle alight, a good deal of darkness, some conversation, a sofa drawn out with her mamma reposing upon it, Robert writing at a table to Mrs. Palmer's dictation.

'My child,' said Mrs. Palmer, 'come here. You have been to St. Paul's. I have been alone the whole afternoon. Your Aunt Sarah never comes near me. I am now getting

this dear fellow to write and order a room for us at Kingston. I told you of my little plan. He is making all the arrangements. It is to be a little *festa* on my husband's birthday; shall we say Tuesday, if fine, Robert? The Admiral will hear of it, and understand that we do not forget him. People say I have no resentment in my nature. It is as well, perhaps, that I should leave untasted a few of the bitter dregs of my hard lot,' continued Mrs. Palmer, cheerfully. 'Have you written to Raban, Robert? My George would wish him remembered.'

'Oh, don't let us have Raban, Aunt Philippa,' said Robert. 'There will be Morgan, and George, and your little friend Rhoda will like to come,—and any one else?'

'I am thankful to say that Mrs. Morgan and those dreadful two girls are going into the country for two days; that is one reason for fixing upon Tuesday,' says Mrs. Palmer. 'I don't want them, Dolly, dearest. Really the society your poor aunt lives in is something too ludicrous. She will be furious; I have not dared tell her, poor creature. I have accepted an invitation for you on Wednesday. Colonel Witherington's sister, in Hyde Park Gardens, has a large dinner-party. She has asked us all three in the kindest manner. Colonel Witherington called himself with the note this afternoon. I wanted him to stay to dinner. I'm afraid your aunt was vexed. Robert, while you are about it, just write a line for us all to Mrs. Middleton.'

Robert wrote Mrs. Palmer's notes, sealed, and stamped them, and, betweenwhiles, gave a cheerful little description of their expedition. 'Dolly was delighted with the service,' said he; 'but I am afraid she is a little tired.' Then he got up and pulled an arm-chair for her up to the fire, and then he went back and finished putting up Mrs. Palmer's correspondence. He was so specially kind that evening, cheerful, and nice to Mrs. Palmer, doing her behests so cleverly

and naturally, that Dolly forgot her terrors and wondered what evil spirit had possessed her. She began to feel warm and happy once more, and hopeful, and she was unaffectedly sorry when Henley got up and said he must go.

He was no sooner gone and the door shut than Mrs. Palmer said, languidly, 'I think I should like Frank Raban to be asked, poor fellow. It will please Rhoda, at all events.'

Dolly blushed up crimson. She had not seen Frank since that curious little talk she had had with George.

'But Robert doesn't wish it, mamma,' said Dolly.

'Nonsense, child. I wish it. Robert is not your husband yet,' said Mrs. Palmer; 'and if he were ——'

'Shall I bring you a pen and ink?' Dolly asked, shyly.

'Just do as I tell you, dearest,' said her mother, crossly. 'Write, "Dear Mr. Raban,—My mother desires me to write and tell you with what pleasure she would welcome you on Tuesday next, if you would join a small expedition we are meditating, a water-party, in honour of Admiral Palmer's 57th birthday."'

'That is not a bit like one of my letters,' said Dolly, finishing quickly. 'Where can Aunt Sarah be?'

'I am sure I don't know, my dear. She left in the rudest manner when Witherington called. I have seen nothing of her.'

Lady Sarah was sitting upstairs alone—oh, how alone! —in the cheerless bedroom overhead, where she used to take her griefs and her sad mistrusts. They seemed to hang from the brown faded curtains by the window; they seemed to haunt all round the bed, among its washed-out draperies; they were ranged along the tall chimney-piece in bottles. Here is morphia and chlorodyne, or its equivalent of those days; here is the 'liniment'—liniment for a strained heart! chloroform for anxious love! Are not each

one of those the relics of one or another wound, reopening again and again with the strains of the present. Sarah's hands are clasped and her head is bent forward as she sits in this half-darkness—leaden grey without, chill within—by the empty hearth. Did Robert love Dolly? Had he love in him? Had she been right to see him through Dolly's eyes?

Just then the door opens, and Dolly, flushed, brightening the dull twilight, comes into the room.

'Come down directly, you wicked woman,' she says. 'You will be catching cold here all by yourself.'

CHAPTER XXX.

WAVE OR FLAME.

> And you have gained a ring.
> What of it? 'Tis a figure, a symbol, say
> A thing's sign.
>
> —R. Browning.

How sweet they are, those long sunset evenings on the river! the stream, flowing by swift and rippling, reflects the sky—sometimes, in the still gleams and depths of dying light, it would seem as if the sky itself reflected the waters. The distant woods stand out in bronzed shadow; low sunset fires burn into dusk beyond the fringe of trees; sudden sweet glooms fall upon the boats as they glide in and out by dim creeks and ridges. Perhaps some barge travels past through the twilight, drawn by horses tramping along the towing-path, and dragging against the sky. As the boats float shorewards, peaceful sights and sounds are all about, borne upon the flowing water.

'I am so sorry it is over,' said Dolly, tying on her straw hat.

The sun was setting, a little star was shining overhead, the last bird had flown home to its nest. Robert pushed them right through a bed of rustling reeds on their way to the landing-place. It was crowded with dancing boats; many people were standing along the shore; the gables of the 'Red Lion' had been all aglow for a few minutes past. They could hear the laugh of a boating-party scrambling to

land. Here and there heads were peeping from the bridge, from the landing-places and windows; some twinkled with the last sunset gleams, others with lights already burning. Dolly had been silent for the last half-hour, scarcely listening to its desultory talk. They had exchanged broadsides with George and John Morgan in the other boat; but by degrees that vigorously-manned craft had outrun them, rounded a corner, and left them floating mid-stream. Robert was in no hurry, and Frank was absent, and sometimes almost forgot to row. Looking up now and then, he saw Dolly's sweet face beaming beneath her loose straw hat, with Hampton Court and all its prim terraces for a background.

'You are not doing your share of the work, Raban, by any means,' said Robert, labouring and not over-pleased.

'Oh, let us float,' murmured Mrs. Palmer. She was leaning over the side of the boat, weighing it heavily down, and dabbling one fat white hand in the water; with the other she was clasping Dolly's stiff young fingers. 'Truant children!' she said, 'you don't know your own happiness. How well I remember one evening just like this, Dolly, when your papa and I were floating down the Hooghly; and, now that I think of it, my Admiral Palmer was with us—he was captain then. How little we either of us thought in those days. The Palmers are so close one needs a lifetime to understand their ways. I should like to show you a letter, Mr. Raban, that I received only this morning from my sister-in-law, Joanna—was that a fish or a little bit of stick? Sweet calm! Robert, I am thankful you have never been entangled by one of those ugly girls at Smokethwaite. I know Joanna and her——'

'There was never any thought, I assure you,' interrupted Robert, not displeased, and unable to refrain from disclaiming the accusation. 'My aunt has always been most kind; she

would never have wished to influence my inclinations—she is very much tried just now, parting from Jonah, who joins his regiment immediately. They are coming up to London with him next Saturday.'

'Ah! I know what it is to part from one's child,' said Philippa, tapping Dolly's fingers. 'I am glad to hear Joanna shows *any* feeling. My Dolly, if it were not to Robert, who is so thoughtful, should I be able to bear the thought of parting from you? Take care—pray take care. You are running into this gentleman's boat. Push off—push off. Ah! ah! thank you, Mr. Raban. Look, there is John Morgan. I wish he were here to steer us.'

'Don't be frightened, dear,' said Dolly, still holding her mother's hand, as the little rocking-boat made towards the steps, where John Morgan was standing welcoming them all with as much heartiness as if they were returning from some distant journey, and had not met for years. Some people reserve themselves for great occasions, instead of spending their sympathies lavishly along the way. Good old John certainly never spared either sympathy or the expression of his hearty good-will. I don't know that the people, who sometimes smiled at his honest exuberances, found that he was less reliable when greater need arose, because he had been kind day after day about nothing at all. He saved Mrs. Palmer from a ducking on this occasion, as she precipitately flung herself out of the boat on to his toes. Frank Raban also jumped on shore. Robert said he would take the *Sarah Anne* back to her home in the boat-house.

'Then I suppose Dolly will have to go too,' said Mrs. Palmer, archly; and Dolly, with a blush and a smile, settled herself once more comfortably on the low cushioned seat. She looked after her mother trailing up the slope, leaning on the curate's arm, and waving farewells until they passed

by the garden-gate of the inn. Frank Raban was slowly following them. Then Dolly and Robert were alone, and out on the river again. The lightened boat swayed on the water. The air seemed to freshen, the ripples flowed in from a distance, the banks slid by. Robert smiled as he bent over the sculls. How often Dolly remembered the last golden hour that came to her that day before the lights had died away out of her sky, before the waters had risen, before her boat was wrecked, and Robert far away out of the reach of her voice!

There were many other people coming back to the boat-house. The men were busy, the landing was crowded, and the *Sarah Anne* had to wait her turn. Robert disliked waiting extremely. He also disliked the looks of open admiration which two canoes were casting at the *Sarah Anne.*

'There are some big stones by the shore, Dolly,' said Robert. 'Do you think you could manage to land?'

'Of course I can,' said active Dolly; 'and then you can tie the boat to that green stake just beyond them.' As she stood up to spring on shore, she looked round once more. Did some instinct tell her that this was the end of it all, and the last of the happy hours? She jumped with steady feet on to the wet stone, and stood balancing herself for a moment. The water rippled to her feet as she stood, with both hands outstretched, and her white dress fluttering, and all the light of youth and happiness in her radiant face. And then with another spring she was on land.

'Well done!' said one of the canoes. Robert turned round with a fierce look.

When he rejoined Dolly, he found her looking about in some distress.

'My ring, my pretty ring, Robert,' she said, 'I have dropped it.' It was a ring he had given her the day before.

Dolly had at last consented to wear one, but this was large for her finger.

'You careless girl,' said Robert; 'here are your gloves and your handkerchief. Do you know what that ring cost?'

'Oh, don't tell me,' said Dolly; 'something dreadful, I know.' And she stood penitently watching Robert scrambling back into the boat, and overthrowing and thumping the cushions. And yet, as she stood there, it came into her mind how many treasures were hers just then, and that of them all a ring was that which she could best bear to lose.

One of the canoes had come close into shore by this time, and the young man, who was paddling with his two spades, called out, saying, 'Are you looking for anything? Is it for this?' and carefully putting his hand into the water he pulled out something shining. The ring had dropped off Dolly's finger as she jumped, and was lying on a stone that was half in and half out of the water, and near to the big one upon which she had been standing.

'How very fortunate!' exclaimed Henley from the boat.

Miss Vanborough was pleased to get back her pretty trinket, and thanked the young man with a very becoming blush.

'It is a very handsome coral,' Robert said; 'it would have been a great pity to lose it. We must have it made smaller, Dora. It must not come off again.'

Dolly was turning it round thoughtfully and looking at the Medusa head carved and set in gold.

'Robert,' she said once more, 'does happiness never frighten you?'

'Never,' said Henley, smiling, as she looked up earnestly into his face.

The old town at Kingston, with its many corners and gables, has something of the look of a foreign city heaped

upon the river-side. The garden of the old inn runs down with terraces to the water. A side-door leads to the boat-houses. By daylight this garden is somewhat mouldy; but spiders' webs do not obtrude on summer evenings, and the Londoners who have come out of town for a breath of fresh air, stroll along the terraces, and watch the stream as it flows, unconscious of their serenity. They come here of summer evenings, and sit out in the little arbours, or walk along the terraces and watch the boats drift with the stream. If they look to the opposite banks they may see the cattle rearing their horned heads upon the sunset, and the distant chestnut groves and galleries of Hampton Court at the bend of the river.

Near the corner of one of these terraces, a little green weather-cocked summer-house stands boldly facing the regattas in their season, and beyond it again are a steep bank and some steps to a second terrace, from whence there is the side-door leading to the boats.

On this particular evening Frank Raban came quietly zigzagging along these terraces, perhaps with some vague hope of meeting Dorothea on her return.

There are some years of one's life when one is less alive than at others, as there are different degrees of strength and power to live in the course of the same existence. Frank was not in the despairing state in which we first knew him, but he was not yet as other people are, and in hours of depression such as this, he was used to feel lonely and apart. He was used to see other people happy, anxious, busy, hurrying after one another, and he would look on as now, with his hands in his pockets, not indifferent, but feeling as if Fate had put him down solitary and silent, into the world—a dumb note (so he used to think) in the great music. And yet he knew that the music was there—that mighty human vibration which exists independent of all the dumb notes,

cracked instruments, rifted lutes, and broken lyres of which we hear so much, and he had but to open his ears to it.

Two voices, anything but dumb, were talking inside the little summer-house. Raban had scarcely noticed them as he came along, listening with the vaguest curiosity, as people do, to reproaches and emotions which do not concern them; but presently, as he approached the summer-house, a tone struck him familiarly, and at the same instant he saw a dark figure rush wildly from the little wooden house, and leap right over the side of the terrace on to the path below; and then Frank recognised the frantic action—it could only be George. A moment afterwards a woman—he knew her too—came out of the summer-house and stood for an instant panting against the doorway, leaning with her two hands against the lintel. She looked pale, troubled; her hair was pushed back from her white face; her eyes looked dark, beautiful. Never before had Raban seen Rhoda (for it was Rhoda) so moved. When she saw him a faint flush came into her cheeks. She came forward a few steps, then she stopped short again.

She was dragging her silk mantle, which had fallen off. One end was trailing after her along the gravel.

'Mr. Raban, is that you?' she said, in an agitated way. 'Why did you come? Is it—is it nearly time to go? Is Mrs. Palmer come back? Oh, *please* take me to her!' And then she suddenly burst into tears, and the long black silk mantle fell to the ground as she put out two fluttering hands.

Raban had flung his cigar over the terrace after George.

'What is it?' he said, anxiously. 'Can I help you in any way? What has happened?'

The young man spoke kindly, but in his usual matter-of-fact voice; and Rhoda, even in her distress, wondered at

his coldness. No one before ever responded so calmly to whom she had appealed.

'Oh, you don't know,' she said; 'I can't tell you.' And the poor little hands went up again with a desperate gesture.

Raban was very much touched; but, as I have said, he had little power of showing his sympathy, and, foolish fellow, doing unto others as he would be done by; he only said, 'I have guessed something before now, Miss Parnell. I wish I could help you, with all my heart. Does not Miss Vanborough know of this? Cannot *she* advise? . . .'

Rhoda was in no mood to hear her friend's praises just then.

'Dolly,' cried Rhoda, passionately, 'she would have every one sacrificed to George. I *would* love him if I could,' she said, piteously, 'but how *can* I? he frightens me and raves at me; how can I love him? Oh! Mr. Raban, tell me that it is not wrong to feel thus?' And once more the fluttering hands went up, and the dark wistful eyes gazed childishly, piteously into his face. Rhoda was looking to Frank for the help that should have come to her from her own heart; she dimly felt that she must win him over, that if he would he could help her.

Rhoda pitied herself sincerely, she sobbed out her history to Frank with many tears. 'How can I tell them all?' she said; 'it will only make wretchedness, and now it is only I who am unhappy.'

Was it only Rhoda who was unhappy? George, flying along the garden half distracted, aching, repentant, might have told another story. She had sent him away. He would do nothing that she wished, she said, he would not accept the independence that Lady Sarah had offered him, Rhoda did not believe in his love, she only wanted him to go, to leave her. Yes, she meant it. And poor George had

rushed away frantic and indignant. He did not care where he went. He had some vague idea that he would get a boat and row away for ever, but as he was hurrying headlong towards the boat-house he saw Dorothea and Robert coming arm-in-arm up the little path, and he turned and hurried back towards the inn. Dolly called to him, but he did not answer. Rhoda had sent him away, poor Dolly could not call him back. Robert shrugged his shoulders.

'Why do you do that?' said Dolly, annoyed; 'he looked quite ill.'

CHAPTER XXXI.

A BOAT UPON THE WATER.

Ich stand gelehnet an den Mast,
Und zählte jede Welle.
Ade mein schönes Vaterland,
Mein Schiff, das segelt schnelle!

Ich kam schon Liebchen's Haus vorbei,
Die Fensterscheiben blinken;
Ich guck' mir fast die Augen aus,
Doch will mir Niemand winken.

Ihr Thränen bleibt mir aus dem Aug,
Dass ich nicht dunkel sehe.
Mein krankes Herz, brich mir nicht
Vor allzugrossem Wehe!

—HEINE.

GEORGE was shivering and sick at heart; the avenue led to a door that opened into the bar of the hotel, and George went in and called for some brandy. The spirits seemed to do him good; no one seeing a clumsy young fellow in a boating dress tossing off one glassful of brandy after another would have guessed at all the grief and passion that were tearing at his poor foolish heart. Rhoda had sent him away. Had he deserved this? Could not she read the truth? Poor timid faithless little thing. Why had he been so fierce to her, why had he told her he was jealous? George had a curious quickness of divination about others, although he was blind about his own concerns. He had reproached Rhoda because she had been talking to Frank, but he knew

well enough that Frank did not care for Rhoda. Poor child, did she know how it hurt him when she shrank from him and seemed afraid? Ah! she would not have been so cruel if she had known all. Thinking of it all he felt as if he had had some little bird in his rough grasp, frightened it, and hurt its wings. Then he suddenly said to himself that he would go back and find his poor frightened bird and stroke it and soothe it, ask it to forgive him. And then he left the place, and as hastily as he had entered; there was a last glass of brandy untasted on the counter, and he hurried back towards the terrace. He passed the window of the room where Mrs. Palmer was ordering tea from the sofa. Dolly, who had just come in, saw him pass by; she did not like his looks, and ran out after him, although both Robert and her mother called her back. George did not see her this time; he flew past the family groups sitting out in the warm twilight; he came to the terrace where he had been a few minutes before, and where the two were still standing—Raban, of whom he had said he was jealous, Rhoda, whom he loved—the two were slowly advancing, Frank's square shoulders dark against the light and Rhoda's slight figure bending forward; she was talking to Raban as she had so often talked to George himself, with that language of earnest eyes, tremulous tones, shrinking movements—how well he knew it all. What was she saying? Was she appealing to Frank to protect her from his love and despair, from the grief that she had done her best to bring about? Rhoda laid her hand upon Raban's arm in her agitation.

It maddened George beyond bearing, and he stamped his heavy foot upon the gravel. Some people passing up from the boats stared at him, but went on their way; and Frank, looking up, saw George coming up swinging his angry arms; his eyes were fierce, his hat was pushed aside. He put Rhoda aside very gently, and took a step forward

between her and George, who stood for a minute looking from one to another, as if he did not understand, and then he suddenly burst out, with a fierce oath: 'Who told you to put yourself in my way?' And, as he spoke, he struck a heavy blow straight at Raban, who had barely time to parry it with his arm.

It was an instant's anger—one of those fatal minutes that undo days and months and years that have gone before; and that blow of George's struck Rhoda's feeble little fancy for him dead on the spot, as she gave a shrill cry of 'For shame!' and sprang forward, and would have clung to Raban's arm. That blow ached for many and many a day in poor Dorothea's heart, for she saw it all from a turn of the path. As for Frank, he recovered himself in an instant.

'Go back, George,' he said; 'I will speak to you presently.'

He did not speak angrily. His voice and the steady look of his resolute eyes seemed to sober the poor reprobate. Not so Rhoda's cry of, 'Go, yes go, for shame!'

'Go! What is it to you if I go or stay? Am I in your way?' shouts George. 'Have you promised to marry him too? Have you tortured him too, and driven him half mad, and then—and then —— Oh, Rhoda, do you really wish me gone?' he cried, breaking down.

There was a tone in his voice that touched Raban, for whom the cry was not intended. Nothing would have melted Rhoda just then. She was angry beyond all power of expression. She wanted him gone, she wanted him silent; she felt as if she hated him..

'You are not yourself; you are not speaking the truth,' said the girl, in a hard voice, drawing herself up. Then, as she spoke, all the brandy and all the fury seemed to mount once more into George's head.

'I am myself, and that is why I leave you,' he shouts; 'you are heartless: you have neither love nor charity in you, and now I leave you. Do you hear me?' he cried, getting louder and louder.

Any one could hear. Dolly could hear as she came hurrying up from the end of the terrace to the spot where her poor boy stood shouting out his heart's secret to unwilling ears. More than one person had stopped to listen to the angry voice. The placid stillness of the evening seemed to carry its echo along the dusky garden bowers, out upon the water flowing down below. Some boatmen had stopped to listen; one or two people were coming up through the twilight.

'He is not sober,' said Rhoda to Dolly. She spoke with a sort of cold disgust.

Dolly hardly heard her at the time. All she saw then was her poor George, with his red angry face—Frank trying to pacify him. Should she ever forget the miserable scene? For long years after it used to rise before her; she used to dream of it at night—of the garden, the river, the figures advancing in the dark.

Dolly ran up to her brother, and instinctively put out her arms as if to shield him from every one.

'Come, dear; come with me,' she said flurriedly; 'don't let them see you like this.'

'It would shock their elegant susceptibilities,' cries the irrepressible George; 'it don't shock them to see a woman playing fast-and-loose with a poor wretch who would have given his life for her—yes, his life, and his love, and his heart's blood!'

Dolly had got her arms tight round George by this time. She had a shrinking dread of Henley seeing him so—he might be coming, she thought.

'Robert might see you. Oh, George, please come,' she

whispered, still clinging to him; and suddenly, to Dolly's surprise, George collapsed, with a sigh. His furious fit was over, and he let his sister lead him where she would.

'Go down by the river-side,' said Raban, coming after them; 'there are too many people the other way.' He spoke in a grave, anxious tone, and as the brother and sister went their way, he looked after them for a moment. Dolly had got her arm fast linked in George's. The young man was walking listlessly by her side. They neither of them looked back; they went down the steps and disappeared.

The place was all deserted by this time; the disturbance being over, the boatmen had gone on their way. George and Dolly went and sat down upon a log which had been left lying near the water-side; they were silent; they could see each other's faces, but little more. He sat crouching over with his chin resting on his hands. Dolly was full of compassion, and longing to comfort; but how could she comfort? Such pain as his was not to be eased by words spoken by another person. When George began to speak at last, his voice sounded so sad and so jarred from its usual sweetness that Dorothea was frightened, as if she could hear in it the echo of a coming trouble.

'I wanted that woman to love me,' he said. 'Dolly, you don't know how I loved her.' He was staring at the stream with his starting eyes, and biting his nails. 'We have no luck, either of us,' he said; 'I don't deserve any, but you do. Tell Frank I'm sorry I struck him; she had made me half mad; she looks at me with those great eyes of hers, and says, "Go!" and she makes me mad: she does it to them all. . . . But now I have left her! left her! left her!' repeated ugly George, with a sort of sob. 'What does she care?' and he got up and shook himself, as a big dog might have done, and went out a step into the twilight, and then came back.

'Thank you, old Dolly, for your goodness,' he said, standing before her. 'I can't face them all again, and Robert with his confounded supercilious airs. I beg your pardon, Dolly; don't look angry. I see how good you are, and I see,' he said, staring her full in the face, 'that we have been both running our heads against a wall.'

He walked on a little way, and Dolly followed. She could not answer him just then. She felt with a pang that George and Robert would never be friends; that she must love them apart; even in heart she must keep them asunder.

They had come to the place where not an hour ago she had jumped ashore. The boat was still there, as they had left it—tied to the stake. The boatmen were at supper, and had not yet taken it in. 'What are you doing?' said Dolly, as George stopped, and began to untie the rope; 'George, be careful.'

'The fresh air will do me good,' he said; 'don't be afraid; I'll take care, if you wish it;' then he nodded, and got into the boat, where the sculls were lying, and he began to shove off with a rattle of the keel upon the shore. 'I will leave the boat at Teddington,' he said, 'and walk home. Good-night! good-by!' he said. A boatman hearing the voices, came out of the boat-house close by, and while Dolly was explaining, the boat started off with a dull plash of oars falling upon dark waters. George was rowing very slowly, his head was turned towards the garden of the inn. There were lights in the windows, and figures coming and going; the water swirled against the wall of the terrace; the scent of the autumnal flowers seemed to fill the air and to stifle him as he passed; a bird chirped from the darkness of some overhanging bushes. He could hear his mother's voice: 'Robert! it is getting late; why don't they come in to tea? I must say it is nasty stuff, and not to compare to that delicious Rangoon flavour.' He paused for a moment; her

voice died away, and then all was silent. The evening was growing chill; some mists were rising. George felt the cool damp wind against his hot brow as he rowed doggedly on—past the lights of the windows of the inn, past the town, under the darkness of the bridge.

He left them all behind, and his life and his love, he thought, and his mad passion; and himself, and Dolly, and Rhoda, and all the hopeless love he longed for and that was never to be his. There were other things in life. So he rowed away into the darkness with mixed anger and peace in his heart. What would Rhoda say when she heard he was gone? Nothing much! He knew her well enough to know that Dolly would understand, but her new ties would part them more entirely than absence or silence.

There is a song of Schubert's I once heard a great singer sing. As she sang, the dull grey river flowed through the room, the bright lamp-lit walls opened out, the mists of a closing darkness surrounded us, the monotonous beat of the rowlocks kept time to the music, and the man rowed away, and silence fell upon the waters.

So Dolly stood watching the boat as it disappeared along the dark wall; for a time she thought she heard the plash of the oars out upon the water, and a dark shade gliding away past the wharves, and the houses that crowd down to the shore.

She was saying her prayers for her poor boy as she walked back slowly to join the others. Robert met her with a little remonstrance for having hidden away so long. She took his arm and clung to it for a minute, trembling, with her heart beating. 'Oh! Robert; you won't let things come between us?' said the girl greatly moved; 'my poor George is so unhappy. He is to blame, but Rhoda has been hard upon him. Have you guessed it all?' 'My dear Dolly,' said Robert, gravely, 'Rhoda has told us everything.

She is most justly annoyed. She is quite overcome. She has just gone home with her uncle, and I must say. . . .' 'Don't, don't say anything,' said Dolly, passionately bursting into tears, and her heart went out after her poor George rowing away along the dark river.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TRUST ME.

How tired we feel, my heart and I!
—E. B. Browning.

The much-talked-of tea was standing, black as the waters of oblivion, in the teapot when they rejoined Mrs. Palmer. Philippa was sitting tête-à-tête with Raban, and seemed chiefly perturbed at having been kept waiting, and because John Morgan had carried off Rhoda.

'I can't think why he did it,' said Mrs. Palmer, crossly; 'it is much pleasanter all keeping together, and it is too silly of that little Rhoda to make such a disturbance. As if George would have said anything to annoy her with all of us present. Tell me, what did really happen, Robert? Why was I not sent for?'

'I am afraid George was a good deal to blame,' said Robert, in a confidential voice. 'I only came up after the fracas, but, from what I hear, I am afraid he had been drinking at the bar. Dolly can tell you more than I can, for she was present from the beginning.'

Dolly was silent: she could not speak. Frank looked at her and saw her blush painfully. He was glad that Miss Vanborough should be spared any farther explication, and that Mrs. Palmer beckoned him into a window to tell him that the Admiral had the greatest horror of intemperance, and that she remembered a fearful scene with a kitmutghar

who had drained off a bottle of her eau-de-Cologne. 'Dear George, unfortunately, was of an excitable disposition. As for the poor Admiral, he is perfectly ungovernable when he is roused,' said Mrs. Palmer, in her heroic manner. 'I have seen strong men like yourself, Mr. Raban, turn pale before him. I remember a sub-lieutenant trembling like an aspen leaf: he had neglected to call my carriage. Is it not time to be off? Dolly, what have I done with my little blue shawl? You say George is *not* coming?'

'Here is your little blue shawl, mamma,' said Dolly, wearily. She was utterly dispirited: she could not understand her mother's indifference, nor Robert's even flow of conversation: she forgot that they did not either of them realise how serious matters had been.

'It is really too naughty of George,' was all that Mrs. Palmer said; 'and, now that I think of it, he certainly told me he might have to go back to Cambridge to-night, so we may not see him again. Mr. Raban, if you see him, tell him —— But, I forgot,' with a gracious smile, 'we meet you to-morrow at the Middletons'. Robert tells me my brother and his family are come to town this week. It will be but a painful meeting I fear. Dolly, remind me to call there in the morning. They have taken a house in Dean's Yard, of all places. And there is Madame Frisette at nine. How tiresome those dressmakers are.'

'Is Madame Frisette at work for Dorothea?' asked Robert, with some interest.

Dolly did not reply, nor did she seem to care whether Madame Frisette was at work or not. She sat leaning back in her corner, with two hands lying listless in her lap, pale through the twilight. Frank Raban, as he looked at her, seemed to know, almost as if she had told him in words, what was passing in her mind. His jealous intuition made him understand it all; he knew too, as well as if Robert

had spoken, something of what he was *not* feeling. They went rolling on through the dusk, between villas and dim hedges and nursery-gardens, beyond which the evening shadows were passing; and all along the way it seemed to Dolly that she could hear George's despairing voice ringing beyond the mist, and, haunted by this echo, she could scarcely listen with any patience to her companion's ripple of small talk, to Mrs. Palmer's anecdotes of Captains and Colonels and anticipation of coming gaiety and emotions. What a season was before her! The Admiral's return, Dolly's marriage, Lady Henley's wearing insinuations—she dreaded to think of it all.

'You must call for us to-morrow at half-past seven, Robert, and take us to the Middletons'. I couldn't walk into the room alone with Dolly. I suppose Joanna, too, will be giving some at-homes. I shall have to go, however little inclined I may feel.'

'It is always well to do what other people do,' said Robert; 'it answers much best in the long run.'

He did not see Dolly's wondering look. Was this the life Dolly had dreamt of? a sort of wheel of commonplace to which poor unquiet souls were to be bound, confined by platitudes, and innumerable threads, and restrictions, and silences. She had sometimes dreamt of something more meaningful and truer, something responding to her own nature, a life coming straighter from the heart. She had not counted much on happiness. Perhaps she had been too happy to wish for happiness; but to-night it occurred to her again what life might be—a life with a truth in it and a genuine response and a nobler scheme than any she had hitherto realised.

Frank heard a sigh coming from her corner. They were approaching the street where he wanted to be set down, and he, too, had something in his mind, which he felt he must

say before they parted. As he wished Dorothea good-night he found a moment to say, in a low voice, 'I hope you may be able to tell Lady Sarah everything that has happened, without reserve. Do trust me. It will be best for all your sakes;' and then he was gone before Dolly could answer.

'What did he say?' said Robert Henley. 'Are you warm enough, Dolly? Will you have a shawl?'

He spoke so affectionately that she began to wonder whether it was because they were not alone that he had been cold and disappointing.

They reached the house, and old Sam came to the door, and Robert helped to unpack the wrecks of the day's pleasures—the hampers, and umbrellas, and armfuls of crumpled muslins. Then the opportunity came for Robert to be impulsive if he chose, for Mrs. Palmer floated upstairs with her candle to say good-night to Lady Sarah. She was kissing her hand over the banisters, and dropping all the wax as she went along.

Robert came up to Dolly, who was standing in the hall. 'Good-night,' he said. 'It might have been a pleasant day upon the whole if it had not been for George. You must get him to apologise to Rhoda, Dora. I mean to speak very plainly to him when I see him next.'

His calmness exasperated her as he stood there with his handsome face looking down a little reproachfully at her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

'Speaking won't do a bit of good, Robert,' she said, hastily. 'Pray don't say much to him ——'

'I wonder when you will learn to trust me, Dora,' said her cousin taking her hand. 'How shall we ever get on unless you do?'

'I am sure I don't know,' Dolly answered, wearily; 'we don't seem to want the same things, Robert, or to be going together a bit.'

'What do you mean?' said Henley. 'You are tired and out of spirits to-night.'

With a sudden reaction Dolly caught hold of his arm, with both hands. 'Robert! Robert! Robert!' she said, holding him fast and looking as if she could transform him with her eyes to be what she wanted.

'Silly child,' he answered, 'I don't think you yourself know what you want. Good-night. Don't forget to be ready in time to-morrow.'

Then he was gone, having first looked for his umbrella, and the door banged upon Robert and the misty stars, and Dolly remained standing at the foot of the stairs. Frank Raban's words had borne fruit as sensible words should do. 'Trust me,' he had said; and Henley had used the same phrase, only with Robert 'Trust me' meant believe that I cannot be mistaken; with Frank 'Trust me' meant trust in truth in yourself and in others. Dolly, with one of those quick impulses which come to impressionable people, suddenly felt that he was right. All along she had been mistaken. It would have been better, far better, from the beginning, to have told Lady Sarah everything. She had been blinded, over-persuaded. Marker came up to shut bolts and put out the lights. Dolly looked up, and she went and laid her tired head on the old nurse's shoulder, and clung to her for an instant.

'Is anything the matter, my dearie?' said Marker.

'Nothing new,' Dolly said. 'Marker, George is not come home. I have so much to say to him! Don't bolt the door, and please leave a light.'

But George did not come home that night, although the door was left unbolted and the light kept burning on purpose. When the morning came his bed was folded smooth, and everything looked straight and silent in his room, which was orderly as places are when the people are away who inhabit them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CIRCUMSTANCE.

The largest minds, still earthward bent, are small,
Who, knowing much, are ignorant of all.
—HAMILTON AÏDE.

FOR some days before the picnic Mrs. Palmer and Julie had been absorbed in the preparation of two beautiful garments that were to be worn at Mrs. Middleton's dinner, and at a ball at Bucklersbury House, for which Mrs. Palmer was expecting an invitation. Lady Sarah had written at her request to ask for one. Meanwhile the dresses had been growing under Julie's art; throwing out fresh flounces and trimmings, and ribbons, hour by hour, until they had finally come to perfection, and were now lying side by side on the bed in the spare room, ready to be tried on for the last time.

'Must it be *now*, mamma?' said Dolly. 'Breakfast is just ready, and Aunt Sarah will be waiting.'

'Julie, go downstairs and beg Lady Sarah not to wait,' said Mrs. Palmer, with great decision.

Julie came back, saying that Miss Rhoda was with Lady Sarah below, and asking for Miss Dolly.

'Presently,' said Mrs. Palmer. 'Very pretty, indeed, Julie!' Then she suddenly exclaimed, 'You cannot imagine what it is, Dolly, to be linked to one so utterly uncongenial, you who are so fortunate in our dear Robert's perfect sympathy and knowledge of London life. He quite agrees with

me in my wish that you should be introduced. Admiral Palmer hates society, except to preach at it—such a pity, is it not! I assure you, strange as it may seem, I quite dread his return.'

Dolly stood bolt upright, scarcely conscious of the dress or the pins, or her mother's monologue. She was still thinking over the great determination she had come to. George had not come back, but Dolly had made up her mind to tell Lady Sarah everything. She was not afraid; it was a relief to have the matter settled. She would say no word to injure him. It was she who had been to blame throughout. Her reflections were oddly intermingled with snips and pricks other than those of her conscience. Once, as Julie ran a pin into her arm, she thought how strange it was that Mr. Raban should have guessed everything all along. Dolly longed and feared to have her explanation over.

'Have you nearly done? Let me go down, Julie,' said Dolly, becoming impatient at last.

But Julie still wanted to do something to the set of the sleeve.

And while Julie was pinning poor Dolly down, the clock struck nine, and the time was over, and Dolly's opportunity was lost for ever. It has happened to us all. When she opened the dining-room door at last she knew in one instant that it was too late.

The room seemed full of people. Lady Sarah was there; Mrs. Morgan bristling by the window; Rhoda was there, kneeling at Lady Sarah's knee, in some agitation: her bonnet had fallen off, her hair was all curling and rough. She started up as Dolly came in, and ran to meet her.

'Oh! Dolly,' she said, 'come, come,' and she seized both her hands. 'I have told Lady Sarah everything; she knows all. Oh! why did we not confide in her long ago?' and

Rhoda burst into tears. 'Oh, I feel how wrong we have been,' she sobbed.

'Rhoda has told me everything, Dolly,' said Lady Sarah, in a cold voice—'everything that those whom I trusted implicitly saw fit to conceal from me.'

Was it Aunt Sarah who had spoken in that cold harsh-sounding tone?

'Rhoda has acted by my advice, and with my full approval,' said Mrs. Morgan, stepping forward. 'She is not one to look back once her hand is to the plough. When I had seen George's letter—it was lying on the table—I said at once that no time should be lost in acquainting your aunt, Dolly. It is inconceivable to me that you have not done so before. We started immediately after our eight-o'clock breakfast, and all is now clearly understood, I trust, Lady Sarah; Rhoda's frankness will be a lesson to Dolly.'

Poor Dolly! she was stiff, silent, overwhelmed. She looked appealingly at her aunt, but Lady Sarah looked away. What could she say? how was it that she was there a culprit while Rhoda stood weeping and forgiven? Rhoda who had enforced the silence, Rhoda now taking merit for her tardy frankness! while George was gone; and Dolly in disgrace.

'Indeed, Aunt Sarah, I would have told you everything,' cried the girl, very much agitated, 'only Rhoda herself made me promise——'

'Dolly! you never promised,' cried Rhoda. 'But we were all wrong,' she burst out with fresh penitence; 'only, Lady Sarah knows all, and we shall be happier now,' she said, wiping her eyes.

'Happy in right-doing,' interrupted Mrs. Morgan.

'Have we done wrong, Aunt Sarah? Forgive us,' said Dolly, with a touching ring in her voice.

Lady Sarah did not answer. She was used to her nephew's misdeeds, but that Dolly—her own Dolly—should

have been the one to plot against her cut the poor lady to the heart. She could not speak. 'And Dolly knew it all the time,' she had said to Rhoda a minute before Dolly came in. 'Yes, she knew it,' said Rhoda. 'She wished it, and feared ——' Here Rhoda blushed very red. 'George told me she feared that you might not approve and do for him as you might otherwise have done. Oh! Lady Sarah, what injustice we have done you!'

'Perhaps Dolly would wish to see the letter,' said Mrs. Morgan, offering her a paper; there was no mistaking the cramped writing. There was no date nor beginning to the note:—

I have been awake all night thinking over what has happened. It is not your fault that you do not know what love is, nor what a treasure I have wasted upon you. I have given you my best, and to you it is worthless. You can't realise such love as mine. You will not even understand the words that I am writing to you: but it is not your fault, any more than it is mine, that I cannot help loving you. Oh, Rhoda, you don't care so much for my whole life's salvation as I do for one moment's peace of mind for you. I see it now—I understand all now. Forgive me if I am hurting you, for the sake of all you have made me suffer. I feel as if I could no longer bear my life here. I must go, and yet I must see you once more. You need not be afraid that I should say anything to frighten or distress you. Your terror of me has pained me far more than you have any conception of. God bless you. I had rather your hands smote me than that another blessed.

'It is most deplorable that a young man of George's ability should write such nonsense,' said Mrs. Morgan.

Poor Dolly flushed up and began to tremble. Her heart ached for her poor George's trouble.

'It is not nonsense,' she said, passionately; 'people call what they cannot feel themselves nonsense. Aunt Sarah, you understand, though they don't. You must see how unhappy he is. How can Rhoda turn against him now? How can she after all that has passed? What harm has he done? It was not wicked to love her more than she loved him.'

'Do you see no cruelty in all this long deception?' said Lady Sarah, with two red spots burning in her cheeks. 'You must both have had some motive for your silence. Have I ever shown myself cold or unfeeling to you?' and the flushed face was turned away from her.

'It was not for herself, Lady Sarah,' said Mrs. Morgan, wishing to see justice done. 'No doubt she did not wish to injure George's prospects.'

Dolly was silent. She had some dim feeling of what was in Lady Sarah's mind; but it was a thought she put aside—it seemed unworthy of them both. She was ashamed to put words to it.

If Dolly and her aunt had only been alone all might have been well, and the girl might have made Lady Sarah understand how true she had been to her and loyal at heart, although silent from circumstances. Dolly looked up with wistful speaking eyes, and Lady Sarah almost understood their mute entreaty.

The words of love are all but spoken when some one else speaks other words; the hands long to grasp each other, and other fingers force them asunder. Alas! Rhoda stood weeping between them, and Mrs. Palmer now appeared in an elegant morning wrapper.

'My dearest child, Madame Frisette is come and is waiting,' said Dolly's mamma, sinking into a chair. 'She is a delightful person, but utterly reckless for trimmings. How do you do, Mrs. Morgan; why do you not persuade Lady Sarah to let Madame Frisette take her pattern, and——?'

But, as usual, Lady Sarah, freezing under Mrs. Palmer's sunny influence, got up and left the room.

Rhoda, tearful and forgiven, remained for some time giving her version of things to Mrs. Palmer. She had come to speak to Lady Sarah by her aunt's advice. Aunt Morgan

had opened George's letter as it lay upon the breakfast-table, and had been as much surprised as Rhoda herself by its contents. They had come to talk things over with Lady Sarah, to tell her of all that had been making Rhoda so unhappy of late.

'I thought she and you, Mrs. Palmer, would have advised me and told me what was right to do,' said the girl, with dark eyes brimming over. 'How can I help it if he loves me? I know that he might have looked higher.'

'The boy is perfectly demented,' said Mrs. Palmer, 'to dream of marrying. He has not a sixpence, my dear child —barely enough to pay his cab-hire. He has been most ridiculous. How we shall ever persuade Lady Sarah to pay his debts I cannot imagine! Dolly will not own to it, but we all know that she does not like parting with her money. I do hope and trust she has made her will, for she looks a perfect wreck.'

'Oh, mamma!' entreated poor Dolly.

Mrs. Palmer paid no heed, except to say crossly, 'I do wish you had shown a little common sense. Dolly, you have utterly injured your prospects. Robert will be greatly annoyed; he counts so much upon dear Sarah's affection for you both. As for me, I have been disappointed far too often to count upon anything. By the way, Dolly, I wish you would go up and ask your aunt whether that invitation has come to Bucklersbury House. Go, child; why do you look so vacant?'

Poor Dolly! One by one all those she trusted most seemed to be failing and disappointing her. Hitherto Dolly had idealised them all. She shrank to learn that love and faith must overcome evil with good, and that this is their reward even in this life, and that to love those who love you is not the whole of its experience.

Rhoda's letter, miserable as it was, had relieved Dolly

from much of her present anxiety about George. That hateful dark river no longer haunted her. He was unhappy, but he was safe on shore. All the same, everything seemed dull, and sad, and undefined that afternoon, and Robert coming in, found her sitting in the oak-room window with her head resting on her hand and her work lying in her lap. She had taken up some work, but as she set the stitches, it seemed to her,—it was but a fancy—that with each stitch George was going farther and farther away, and she dropped her work at last into her lap, and reasoned herself into some composure; only when her lover came in cheerfully and talking with the utmost ease and fluency, her courage failed her suddenly.

'What is the matter; why do you look so unhappy?' said Robert.

'Nothing is the matter,' said Dolly, 'only most things seem going wrong, Robert; and I have been wrong, and there is nothing to be done.'

'What is the use of making yourself miserable?' said Robert, good-naturedly scolding her; 'you are a great deal too apt, Dolly, to trouble yourself unnecessarily. You must forgive me for saying so. This business between George and Rhoda is simply childish, and there is nothing in it to distress you.'

'Do you think that nothing is unhappiness,' said Dolly, going on with her own thought, 'unless it has a name and a definite shape?'

'I really don't know,' said Henley. 'It depends upon . . . What is this invitation, Dora? You don't mean to say the Duchess has not sent one yet?' he said in a much more interested voice.

'There is only the card for Aunt Sarah. I am afraid mamma is vexed, and it is settled that I am not to go.'

'Not to go?' Robert cried; 'my dear Dolly, of course

you must go; it is absolutely necessary you should be seen at one or two good houses, after all the second-rate society you have been frequenting lately. Where is your mother?'

When Mrs. Palmer came in, in her bonnet, languid and evidently out of temper, and attended by Colonel Witherington, Robert immediately asked, in a heightened tone of voice, whether it was true that Dolly was not to be allowed to go to the ball.

Philippa replied in her gentlest accents that no girl should be seen without her mother. If an invitation came for them both, everything was ready; and, even at the last moment, she should be willing to take Dorothea to Bucklersbury House.

'Too bad,' said the Colonel, sitting heavily down in Lady Sarah's chair. 'A conspiracy, depend upon it. They don't wish for too much counter-attraction in a certain quarter.'

'One never knows what to think,' said Mrs. Palmer, thoughtfully; 'I have left a card this afternoon, Robert, upon which I wrote a few words in pencil, to explain my connection with Sarah. I wished to show that I at least was not unacquainted with the usages of civilised society. Kindly hand me that *Peerage*.'

'My dear Aunt Philippa,' cried Robert, walking up and down in a state of the greatest perturbation, 'what induced you to do such a preposterous thing? What will the Duchess think of us all?'

Mrs. Palmer, greatly offended, replied that she could not allow Robert to speak to her in such disrespectful tones. The Duchess might think what she chose; Dolly should not go without her.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHITE ROSES.

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only.

SOME one sent Dolly a great bunch of white roses that afternoon; they came in with a late breath of summer—shining white with dark leaves and stems—and, as Dolly bent her head over the soft zones, breathing their sweet breath, it seemed to carry her away into cool depths of fragrance. The roses seemed to come straight from some summer garden, from some tranquil place where all was peace and silence. As she stood, holding them in her two hands, the old garden at All Saints' came before her, and the day when Robert first told her that he loved her. How different things seemed already—the roses only were as sweet as she remembered them. Every one seemed changed since then—Robert himself most of all; and if she was herself disappointed, was she not as changed as the rest?

But these kind, dear roses had come to cheer her, and to remind her to be herself, of all that had gone before. How good of Robert to think of them! She wished they had come before he left, that she might have thanked him. She now remembered telling him, as they were driving down to the river, that no roses were left in their garden.

'Very pretty,' said her mother. 'Take them away,

Dolly; they are quite overpowering. You know, Colonel Witherington, how much better people understand these things at Trincomalee: and what quantities of flowers I used to receive there. Even the Admiral once ordered in six dozen lemon-shrubs in tubs for my fête. As for the people in this country, they don't do things by halves, but by quarters, my dear Colonel.'

Mrs. Palmer was still agitated, nor did she regain her usual serenity until about six o'clock, when, in answer to a second note from Lady Sarah, the persecuted Duchess sent a blank card for Mrs. Palmer to fill up herself if she chose.

When Dolly came to say good-night to Lady Sarah she held her roses in her hand: some of the leaves shook down upon her full white skirts; it was late in the summer, and the sweet heads hung languid on their stalks. They were the last roses that Dolly wore for many and many a day.

'So you are going,' said Lady Sarah.

'Yes,' said Dolly, waiting for one word, one sign to show that she was forgiven: she stood with sun-gilt hair in the light of the western window. 'Dear Aunt Sarah, you are not well. You must not be left all alone,' she went on timidly.

'I am quite well—I shall not be alone,' said Lady Sarah. 'Mr. Tapeall is coming, and I am going to sign my will, Dolly,' and she looked her niece hard in the face. 'I shall not change it again whatever may happen. You will have no need in future to conceal anything from me, for the money is yours.' And Lady Sarah sighed, deeply hurt.

Dolly blushed up. 'Dear Aunt Sarah, I do not want your money,' she said. 'You could never have thought——'

'I can only judge people by their deeds,' said Lady Sarah, coldly still. 'You and George shall judge me by mine, whether or not I have loved you;' and the poor old voice

failed a little, and the lips quivered as she held up her cheek for Dolly to kiss.

'Dear, dearest,' said Dolly, 'only forgive me too. If you mean that you are going to leave me money, I shall not be grateful. I have enough. What do I want? Only that you should love us always. Do you think I would marry Robert if he did not think so too?'

'Mademoiselle! Madame is ready,' cried Julie, coming to the door, and tapping.

'George, too, would say the same, you know he would,' Dolly went on, unheeding Julie's call. 'But if you give him what you meant for me, dear Aunt Sarah; indeed that would make me happiest, and then I should know you forgive me.'

The door creaked, opened, and Mrs. Palmer stood there impatient in her evening dress.

'My dear Dolly, what have you got to say to Aunt Sarah? We shall be dreadfully late, and Robert is fuming. *Do* pray come. Good-night, Sarah—so sorry to leave you.'

Rather than keep dinner waiting people break off their talk, their loves, their prayers. The Middletons' dinner was waiting, and Dolly had to come away. Some of the rose-leaves were lying on the floor after she had left, and the caressing fragrance still seemed to linger in the room.

Dolly left home unforgiven, so she thought. Aunt Sarah had not smiled nor spoken to her in her old voice once since that wretched morning scene.

But, in truth, Lady Sarah was clearer-sighted than people gave her credit for; she was bitterly hurt by Dolly's want of confidence, but she began to understand the struggle which had been going on in the girl's mind, and so far, things were not so sad as she had imagined at first. They were dismal enough.

When Marker came to tell Lady Sarah that Mr. Tapeall and his clerks were below, she got up from her chair wearily,

and went down to meet the lawyer. What did she care now? She had saved, and pinched, and laid by (more of late than any one suspected), and Dolly was to benefit, and Dolly did not care; Robert only seemed to count upon the money. It is often the most cautious people who betray themselves most unexpectedly. Something in Henley's manner had annoyed Lady Sarah of late. He had spoken of George with constant disparagement. More than once Robert had let slip a word that showed how confidently he looked for Dolly's inheritance.

One day Mrs. Palmer had noticed Lady Sarah's eyes upon him, and immediately tried to cover his mistake. Not so Dolly, who said, 'Robert! what are you thinking of? How should we ever be able to afford a country-house if you go into Parliament?'

'Robert thinks he is marrying an heiress, I suppose,' said Lady Sarah.

'No, he doesn't,' Dolly answered; 'that would spoil it all.'

This was all the gratitude poor Lady Sarah had saved and pinched herself to win.

Lady Sarah, as I have said, might have been a money-lover, if her warm heart had not saved her. But she was human, and she could not help guessing at Robert's comfortable calculations, and she resented them. Did she not know what it was to be married, not for herself, but for what she could bring? Was *that* to be her Dolly's fate? Never, never! Who knows? Let her have her own way; it may be best after all, thought Lady Sarah, wearily. She was tired of battling. Let George inherit, if it so pleased them. To please them was all she had wished or hoped for, and now even the satisfaction of pleasing them in her own way was denied her. But her girl was true; this she felt. No sordid thoughts had ever come between them, and for this she thanked God in her heart.

'You may burn it, Mr. Tapeall,' said Lady Sarah, as the

lawyer produced a beautiful neatly-written parchment, where Miss Dorothea Vanborough's name was emblazoned many times. 'I want you to make me another. Yes, make it directly, and I will sign it at once, and old Sam can bear witness.'

'I shall be happy to receive any further instructions,' said the lawyer; 'I shall have to take the memorandum home with me to prepare——'

'I will sign the memorandum,' said Lady Sarah. 'You can have it copied, if you like, Mr. Tapeall; but I wish to have this business settled at once, and to hear no more of it. There is a pen and some ink on that table.'

'Where did you get your roses?' said Robert to Dolly; 'I thought you told me they were over.'

'Did not you send them?' said Dolly, disappointed. 'Who can have sent them? *Not* Colonel Witherington?'

'Mr. Raban is more likely,' said Mrs. Palmer. 'Julie tells me he came to the door this afternoon.'

'How kind of him!' cried Miss Vanborough.

'It was quite unnecessary,' said Robert. 'Nobody, in society, carries bouquets now.'

'Then I am not in society,' said Dolly, laughing; but although she laughed, she felt sad and depressed.

When the door opened and Mrs. Palmer, followed by her beautiful daughter and Henley, came into the room at Mrs. Middleton's, Colonel Witherington declared, upon his honour, they quite brightened up the party. White and gracious with many laces and twinklings, Mrs. Palmer advances, taking to society as a duck takes to the water, and not a little pleased with the sensation she is creating. Dolly follows, looking very handsome, but, it must be confessed, somewhat absent. Her mother had excellent taste, and had devised a most becoming costume, and if Dolly had only been herself she would

certainly have done credit to it; but she had not responded to Mademoiselle Julie's efforts—a sudden fit of dull shyness seemed to overpower her. If Frank Raban had been there she would have liked to thank him for her flowers; but Mrs. Middleton began explaining to Robert how sorry she was that his friend Mr. Raban had been obliged to go off to Cambridge. Dolly was a little disappointed. The silvery folds of her dress fell each in juxtaposition; but Dolly sat silent and pale and far away, and for some time she scarcely spoke.

'That girl does not look happy,' said some one.

Robert overheard the speech, and was very much annoyed by it. These constant depressions were becoming a serious annoyance to him. He took Dolly down to dinner, but he devoted himself to a sprightly lady on his left hand, who, with many shrieks of laughter and wrigglings and twinklings of diamonds, spurred him on to a brilliance foreign to his nature. Young as he was, Robert was old for his age, and a capital diner-out, and he had the art of accommodating himself to his audience. Mrs. Palmer was radiant sitting between two white neckcloths: one belonged to the Viscount Portcullis, the other to the faithful Witherington; and she managed to talk to them both at once.

Dolly's right-hand neighbour was an upright, rather stern, soldierly-looking man, with a heavy white moustache. He spoke to her, and she answered with an effort, for her thoughts were still far away, and she was preoccupied still. Dolly was haunted by the sense of coming evil; she was pained by Robert's manner. He was still displeased, and he took care to show that it was so. She was troubled about George; she was wondering what he was about. She had written to him at Cambridge that afternoon a loving, tender, sisterly little letter, begging him to write to his faithful sister Dolly. Again she told herself that it was absurd to be anxious, and wicked to be cross, and she tried to shake off

her depression, and to speak to the courteous though rather alarming neighbour on her right hand.

It was a dinner-party just like any other. They are pretty festivals on the whole, although we affect to decry them. In the midst of the Middleton dinner-table was an erection of ice and ferns and cool green grass, and round about this circled the entertainment—flowers, dried fruit, processions of cut glass and china, with entrées, diversities of chicken and cutlet, and then ladies and gentlemen alternate, with a host at one end and a hostess at the other, and an outermost ring of attendants, pouring out gold and crimson juices into the crystal cups.

It is fortunate, perhaps, that other people are not silent always because we are sad. With all its objections—I have read this in some other book—there is a bracing atmosphere in society, a Spartan-like determination to leave cares at home, and to try to forget all the ills and woes and rubs to which we are subject, and to think only of the present and the neighbours fate has assigned for the time. Little by little, Dolly felt happier and more reassured. Where everything was so commonplace and unquestioning, it seemed as if tragedy could not exist. Comedy seems much more real at times than tragedy. Three or four tragedies befall us in the course of our existence, and a hundred daily comedies pass before our eyes.

Dolly, hearing her mother's silver laugh and Robert's cheerful duet, was reassured, and she entered little by little into the tune of the hour, and once, glancing up shyly, she caught a very kind look in her neighbour's keen dark eyes.

He knew nothing of her, except a sweet girlish voice and a blush; but that was enough almost, for it was Dolly's good fortune to have a voice and a face that told of her as she was. There are some smiles and blushes that mean

nothing at all, neither happy emotion nor quick response; and, again, are there not other well-loved faces which are but the homely disguises in which angels have come into our tents? Dolly's looks pleased her neighbour, nor was he disappointed when he came to talk to her; he felt a kindness towards the girl, and a real interest when he discovered her name. He had known her father in India many years before. 'Had she ever heard of David Fane?' Colonel Fane seemed pleased when Dolly brightened up and exclaimed. He went on to tell her that he was on his way to the Crimea: his regiment was at Southampton, waiting its orders to sail.

'And you are going to that dreadful war!' said Dolly, in her girlish tones, after a few minutes' talk.

Colonel Fane looked very grave.

'Your father was a brave soldier,' he said; 'he would have told you that war is a cruel thing; but there are worse things than fighting for a good cause.'

'You mean *not* fighting,' said Dolly; 'but how can we who sit at home in peace and safety be brave for others?'

'I have never yet known a woman desert her post in the time of danger,' said Colonel Fane, speaking with gentle, old-fashioned courtesy. 'You have your own perils to affront: they find you out even in your homes. I saw a regiment of soldiers to-day,' he said, smiling, 'in white caps and aprons, who fight with some very deadly enemies. They are under the command of my sister, my brother's widow. She is a hospital-nurse, and has charge of a fever-ward at present.'

Then he went on to tell Dolly that his brother had died of small-pox not long before, and his wife had mourned him, not in sackcloth and ashes, but in pity and love and devotion to others. Dolly listened with an unconscious look of sympathy that touched Colonel Fane more than words.

'And is she quite alone now?' said Dolly.

'I should like you to know her some day,' he said. 'She is less alone than anybody I know. She lives near St. Barnabas' Hospital; and if you will go and see her sometime when she is at home and away from her sick, she will make, not acquaintance, but friends with you, I hope.'

Then he asked Dolly whether she was an only child, and the girl told him something—far more than she had any idea of—about George.

'I might have been able to be of some little use to your brother if he had chosen the army for a profession,' said Colonel Fane, guessing that something was amiss.

Dolly was surprised to find herself talking to Colonel Fane, as if she had known him all her life. A few minutes before he had been but a name. When he offered to help George, Dolly blushed up, and raised two grateful eyes.

There is something in life which is not love, but which plays as great a part almost—sympathy, quick response—I scarcely know what name to give it; at any moment, in the hour of need perhaps, a door opens, and some one comes into the room. It may be a common-place man in a shabby coat, a placid lady in a smart bonnet; does nothing tell us that this is one of the friends to be, whose hands are to help us over the stony places, whose kindly voices will sound to us hereafter voices out of the infinite. Life has, indeed, many phases, love has many a metempsychosis. Is it a lost love we are mourning—a lost hope? Only dim, distant stars, we say, where all was light. Lo, friendship comes dawning in generous and peaceful streams!

Before dinner was over, Colonel Fane said to Dolly, 'I hope to have another talk with you some day. I am not coming upstairs now; but, if you will let me do so, I shall ask my sister, Mrs. William Fane, to write to you when she is free.'

Robert was pleased to see Dolly getting on so well with her neighbour. He was a man of some mark, and a most desirable acquaintance for her. Robert was just going to introduce himself, when Mrs. Middleton bowed to Lady Portcullis, and the ladies began to leave the room.

'Good-by,' said Dolly's new friend, very kindly; 'I shall ask you not to forget your father's old companion. If I come back, one of my first visits shall be to you.'

Then Dolly stood up blushing, and then she said, 'Thank you, very much; I shall never forget you. I, too, am going away—to India—with ——' and she looked at Henley, who was at that moment receiving the parting fire of the lively lady. There was no time to say more; she put out her hand with a grateful pressure. Colonel Fane watched Dolly as she walked away in the procession. For her sake he said a few civil words to Henley; but he was disappointed in him. 'I don't think poor Stan Vanborough would have approved of such a cut-and-dry son-in-law,' the Colonel said to himself as he lighted his cigar and came away into the open street.

CHAPTER XXXV.

'ONLY GEORGE.'

Nicht mitzuhassen, mitzulieben bin ich da.
—ANTIGONE.

THOUGHTS seem occasionally to have a life of their own - a life independent; sometimes they are even stronger than the thinkers, and draw them relentlessly along. They seize hold of outward circumstances with their strong grip. How strangely a dominant thought sometimes runs through a whole epoch of life!

With some holy and serene natures, this thought is peace in life; with others, it is human love, that troubled love of God.

The moonlight is streaming over London; and George is not very far away, driven by his master thought along a bright stream that flows through the gates and by the down-trodden roads that cross Hyde Park. The skies, the streets, are silver and purple; abbey-towers and far-away houses rise dim against the stars; lights burn in shadowy windows. The people passing by, and even George, hurrying along in his many perplexities, feel the life and the echo everywhere of some mystical chord of nature and human nature striking in response. The very iron rails along the paths seemed turned to silver. George leaps over a silver railing, and goes towards a great sea of moonlight lying among the grass and encircled by shadowy trees.

In this same moonlit stream, flowing into the little drawing-room of the bow-windowed house in Old Street, sits Rhoda, resting her head against the pane of the lantern-like window, and thinking over the events of the last two days.

On the whole, she feels that she has acted wisely and for the best. Lady Sarah seemed to think so—Uncle John said no word of blame. It was unfortunate that Aunt Morgan's curiosity should have made her insist upon reading George's letter; but no harm had come of it. Dolly, of course, was unreasonable. Rhoda, who was accustomed to think of things very definitely, began to wonder what Frank Raban would think of it all, and whether Uncle John would tell him. She thought that Mr. Raban would not be sorry to hear of what had occurred. What a pity George was not more like Mr. Raban or Robert Henley. How calm they were; while he—he was unbearable; and she was very glad it was all over between them. Lady Sarah was evidently deeply offended with him.

'I hope she will leave him *something*,' thought Rhoda. 'He will never be able to make his way. I can see that; and he is so rough, and I am such a poor little thing,' and Rhoda sighed. 'I shall always feel to him as if he were a brother, and I shall tell Mr. Raban so if ——'

Here Rhoda looked up, and almost screamed out, for there stood George, rippling with moonlight, watching her through the window from the opposite side of the street. He looked like a ghost as he leant against the railings. He did not care who noticed him, nor what other people might think of him. He had come all this way only to see Rhoda once more, and there she was, only separated from him by a pane of glass.

When Rhoda looked up, George came across and stood under the window. The moonlight stream showed him a silver figure plain marked upon the darkness. There she

sat with a drooping head and one arm lightly resting against the bar. Poor boy! He had started in some strange faith that he should find her. He had come up all the way only to look at her once more. All his passionate anger had already died away. He had given up hope, but he had not given up love; and so he stood there wild and haggard, with pulses throbbing. He had scarcely eaten anything since the evening before. He had gone back to Cambridge he knew not why. He had lain awake all night, and all day he had been lying in his boat hiding under the trees along the bank, looking up at the sky and cursing his fate.

Rhoda looked up. George, with a quick movement, pointed to the door, and sprang up the steps of the house. He must speak to her now that she had seen him. For what else had he come? She was frightened, and did not move at first in answer to his signs. She was alone. Aunt Morgan and the girls were drinking tea at the schools, but Uncle John was in the study. She did not want him to see George. It would only make a fuss and an explanation—there had been too much already. She got up and left the window, and then went into the hall and stood by the door undecided; and as she stood there she heard a low voice outside say, 'Rhoda! let me in.'

Rhoda still hesitated. 'Let me in,' said the voice again, and she opened the door a very little way, and put her foot against it.

'Good-night, George,' she said, in a whisper. 'Good-night. Go home. Dolly is so anxious about you.'

'I have come to see you,' said George. 'Why won't you let me in, Rhoda?'

'I am afraid,' said Rhoda.

'You need not be afraid, Rhoda,' he said, going back a step. 'Dear, will you forgive me for having frightened you?' and he came nearer again.

'I can't—go, go,' cried Rhoda, hastily. 'Here is some one,' and suddenly, with all her might, she pushed the door in his face. It shut with a bang, with all its iron knobs and locks rattling.

'What is it?' said John Morgan, looking out of his study.

'I had opened the door, Uncle John,' said Rhoda. Her heart beat a little. Would George go away? She thought she heard footsteps striking down the street. Then she felt more easy. She told herself once more that it was far better to have no scenes nor explanations, and she sat down quietly to her evening's task in a corner of her uncle's study. She was making some pinafores for the little Costellos, and she tranquilly stitched and tucked and hemmed. John Morgan liked to see her busy at her womanly work, her little lamp duly trimmed, and her busy fingers working for others more thriftless.

And outside in the moonlight George walked away in a new fury. What indignity had he subjected himself to? He gave a bitter sort of laugh. He had not expected much, but this was worse than anything he had expected. Reproaches, coldness, indifference, all these he was prepared for. He knew in his heart of hearts that Rhoda did not care for him; and what further wrong could she do him than this injury that people inflict every day upon each other? She had added scorn to her indifference; and again George laughed to himself, thinking of this wooden door Rhoda had clapped upon his passion, and her summary way of thrusting him out.

At one time, instead of banging the door, she used to open it wide. She used to listen to him, with her wonderful dark eyes fixed on his face. Now, what had happened? He was the same man, she was the same woman, and nothing was the same. George mechanically walked on towards his

own home—if Church House could be so called. He went across the square, and by a narrow back street, and he tried the garden gate, and found it open, and went in, with some vague idea of finding Dolly, and calling her to the bench beside the pond, and of telling her of all his trouble. That slam of the door kept sounding in his ears, a sort of knell to his love.

But George was in no vein of luck that night. The garden was deserted and mysterious, heavy with sweet scents in the darkness. He went down the dark path and came back again, and there was a rustle among the trees; and as he walked across the lawn towards the lighted window of the oak room, he heard two voices clear in the silence, floating up from some kitchen below. He knew Sam's croak; he did not recognise the other voice.

'Mademoiselle is gone to dance. I like to dance too,' it said. 'Will you come to a ball and dance with me, Mr. Sam?'

Then followed old Sam's chuckle. 'I'll dance with you, Mademoiselle,' he said.

George thought it sounded as if some evil spirit of the night were mocking his trouble. And so Dolly was dancing while he was roaming about in his misery. Even Dolly had forgotten his pain. Even Rhoda had turned him out. Who cared what happened to him now?

He went to the window of the oak room and looked in. Lady Sarah was sitting there alone, shading her eyes from the light. There were papers all round about her. The lamp was burning behind her, and the light was reflected in the narrow glass above her tall chimney-piece.

He saw her put out her hand and slowly take a paper that was lying on the table, and tear it down the middle. Poor Aunt Sarah! she looked very old and worn and sad. How ill he had repaid her kindness! She should be spared

all further anxiety and trouble for him. Then he put out his two hands with a wild farewell motion. He had not meant her to see him, but the window was ajar and flew open, and then he walked in; and Lady Sarah, looking up, saw George standing before her. He was scarcely himself all this time: if he had found Dolly all might have ended differently.

'George?' said Lady Sarah, frightened by his wild looks, 'what has happened, my dear?'

'I have come to say good-by to you,' he wildly cried. 'Aunt Sarah, you will never have any more trouble with me. You have been a thousand thousand times too good to me!' And he flung his two arms round her neck and kissed her, and almost before she could speak he was gone. . . .

A few minutes later Marker heard a fall, and came running upstairs. She found Lady Sarah lying half-conscious on the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE SLOW SAD HOURS.

> And thou wert sad, yet I was not with thee;
> And thou wert sick, and yet I was not there.
>
> —BYRON.

DOLLY and her mother had left the Middletons' when John Morgan drove up in a hansom, with a message from his mother to bring them back at once. The servant told him that they were only just gone, and he drove off in pursuit. Bucklersbury House was blazing in the darkness, with its many windows open and alight, and its crowds pouring in and its music striking up. Morgan sprang out of his cab and hurried across the court, and under the horses' noses, and pushed among the footmen to the great front door where the inscribing angels of the *Morning Post* were stationed. The servants would have sent him back, but he told his errand in a few hasty words, and was allowed to walk into the hall. He saw a great marble staircase all alight, and people going up; and, by some good fortune, one of the very first persons he distinguished was Dolly, who had only just come, and who was following her mother and Robert. She, too, caught sight of the familiar face in the hall below, and stopped short.

'Mamma,' she said, 'there is John Morgan making signs. Something has happened.'

Mrs. Palmer did not choose to hear. She was going in;

she was at the gates of Paradise: she was not going to be kept back by John Morgan. There came a cheerful clang of music from above.

Dolly hesitated; the curate beckoned to her eagerly. 'Mamma, I must go back to him,' said Dolly, and before her mother could remonstrate she had stopped short and slid behind a diplomat, a lord with a blue ribbon, an aged countess; in two minutes she was at the foot of the staircase, Robert meanwhile serenely proceeding ahead, and imagining that his ladies were following.

In two words, John Morgan had told Dolly to get her shawl, that her aunt was ill, that she had been asking for her. Dolly flew back to the cloak-room: she saw her white shawl still lying on the table, and she seized it and ran back to John Morgan again, and then they had hurried through the court and among the carriages to the place where the hansom was waiting.

'And I was away from her!' said Dolly. That was nearly all she said. It was her first trouble—overwhelming, unendurable, bewildering, as first troubles are. When they drove up to Church House, the front looked black, and closed, and terrible somehow. Dolly's heart beat as she went in.

Everything seemed a little less terrible when she had run upstairs, and found her aunt lying in the familiar room, with a faint odour of camphor and chloroform, and Marker coming and going very quietly. Mrs. Morgan was there with her bonnet cocked a little on one side; she came up and took Dolly's hand with real kindness, and said some words of encouragement, and led her to the bedside. As Dolly looked at Aunt Sarah's changed face, she gulped for the first time one of life's bitter draughts. They don't last long, those horrible moments; they pass on, but they leave a burning taste; it comes back again and again with the troubles of life.

Lady Sarah seemed to recognise Dolly when she first came in, then she relapsed again, and lay scarce conscious, placid, indifferently waiting the result of all this nursing and anxious care. The struggles of life and its bustling anxieties had passed away from that quiet room, never more to return.

Dolly sat patiently by the bedside. She had not taken off her evening dress, she never moved, she scarcely breathed, for fear of disturbing her dear sick woman. If Frank Raban could have seen her then, he would not have called her cold! Those loving looks and tender ways might almost have poured new life into the worn-out existence that was ebbing away. The night sped on, as such nights do pass. She heard the sound of carriage-wheels coming home at last, and crept downstairs to meet the home-comers.

Dolly did not ask her mother what had delayed her when the two came in. She met them with her pale face. She was still in her white dress, with the dying roses in her hair. Henley, who had meant to reproach her for deserting them without a word, felt ashamed for once before her. She seemed to belong to some other world, far away from that from which he had just come. She told her story very simply. The doctors said there had been one attack such as this once before, which her aunt had kept concealed from them all. They ordered absolute quiet. Marker was to be nurse, and one other person. 'Of course that must be me, mamma. I think Aunt Sarah would like me best,' she said, with a faint smile. 'Mrs. Morgan! No, dear mamma, not Mrs. Morgan.' Then suddenly she burst into tears. 'Oh, mamma, I have never seen any one so ill,' she said; but the next minute she had overcome her emotion, and wiped her eyes.

'My dearest child, it is most distressing, and that you should have missed your ball, too!' said Philippa. 'I said

all along, if you remember, that she was looking a perfect wreck. You would not listen to me. Robert, turn that sofa out of the draught. I shall not go to bed. Julie can come down here and keep me company after you go.'

'I must go,' said Robert; 'I have still some work to finish. Take care of yourself, Dora—remember you belong to me now. I hope there will be better news in the morning.'

From one room to the other, all the next day, Dolly went with her heavy heart—it seemed to drag at her as she moved, to dull her very anxiety. It was only a pain, it did not rise to the dignity of an emotion. Mrs. Palmer felt herself greatly neglected; she was taken ill in the afternoon and begged to see the doctor, who made light of her ailment; towards evening Mrs. Palmer was a great deal better. She came down into the drawing-room, and sent Eliza Twells over for John Morgan. Lady Sarah still lay stricken silent, but her pulse was better, the doctor said: she could move her arm a little: it had been lying helpless before. Faithful Marker sat by her side, rubbing her cold hands.

'Aunt Sarah, do you know me?' whispered Dolly, bending over her.

Lady Sarah faintly smiled in answer.

'Tell George to come back,' she said slowly. 'Dolly, I did as you wished; are you satisfied?' She had gone back to the moment when she was taken ill.

'Dearest Aunt Sarah,' said Dolly, covering her hand with kisses. Then she ran down to tell her mother the good news. 'Aunt Sarah was rallying, was talking more like herself again. We only want George to make her well again. He must come. Where is he? Why does he not come?'

'Don't ask *me* anything about George,' said Mrs. Palmer, putting up her hands.

This was the day after the ball, but no George came,

although Dolly looked for him at every instant. John Morgan, of his own accord, sent a second message to him and another to Raban. In the course of the day an answer arrived from the tutor: '*G. left Cambridge yesterday. Your telegram to him lying unopened.*'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN AN EMPTY ROOM.

Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour.
—SHAKSPEARE.

THE next day Dolly, coming down into the garden, found Raban with her mother, and she went up eagerly to meet him, hoping for the news she was looking for. But news there was none, although her mother, arm-in-arm with Raban, had been for the last hour slowly pacing the gravel-walks, recapitulating all their anxieties and all the complaints they had against that tiresome boy.

'The Admiral will be so shocked. I expect him hourly; and I look to *you*, Mr. Raban, to tell me the plain truth.'

The plain truth was that Frank could discover nothing of George. All that long day he had followed up every trace, been everywhere, questioned every one, including Rhoda, without result. He had come now in the faint hope of finding him at home after all. When Dolly came to meet them, he thought she looked anxious enough already, and he made light of his long efforts, and shrugged his shoulders.

'I have no doubt George will turn up at Cambridge in the course of a day or two. I have some business calls me away. I will write immediately on my return,' he said.

Frank saw Dolly's look of surprise and disappointment as she turned away, and his heart ached for her; but what could he do? He watched her as she turned back towards

the house again, walking slowly and with a thoughtful bent head.

'It is quite painful to see Dolly, she has no feeling whatever for me left,' cried Mrs. Palmer. 'Ever since dear George's conduct, I see the saddest change in her. I can do nothing. I would drive her out. Colonel Witherington offered me his sister's barouche any day, but Dolly won't hear of it. Dolly, you know, is simply impossible,' said Mrs. Palmer. 'I never knew a more desponding nature.'

'Indeed?' said Raban.

It was not his place to be sorry for her. He was not able to shield her from grief. It was not his place to think for her, to love her in her trouble. It was not for him: all this was for Robert Henley to do.

There was a great red sunset in the sky, islands floating, and lakes and seas of crimson light overhead, as Dolly walked sadly and slowly into the house, and went back to the dim sick-room.

There is no need to dwell upon the slow hours. Dolly found that they came to an end somehow. And all the time one miserable conviction pursued her—George was gone. Of this she was convinced, notwithstanding all they could say to reassure her. While they had been expecting him, and blaming him, and wondering, and discussing his plans, he had fled from them all. Dolly at first did not face the truth, for she had sat by her aunt's bedside half dull, half absorbed by her present anxiety; but when Lady Sarah began to rally a little, the thought of George grew more constant, the longing for news more unendurable; time seemed longer: it became an eternity at last. One day she felt as if she could bear it no longer.

Robert found her looking very much moved; her cheeks were glowing, her eyes were shining blue; she had a cloak

on her arm, and some white summer dress, and she began tying her bonnet-strings nervously.

'Robert, I want you to take me to Cambridge,' she said. 'I want to go now. I know I could find him—I dreamt it. Aunt Sarah wants him back directly. . . .'

'You are quite unreasonable, dearest,' said Robert, soothingly.

'I am not: I am reasonable,' poor Dolly said, with an effort at self-control. 'Mr. Raban cannot find him. Robert, let me go.' And Robert yielded reluctantly to her wish.

'Have you got a *Bradshaw* in the house?' said he.

Dolly had got one all ready, with the page turned down—she could spare but a few hours, and was in a hurry to get back.

After all, sympathy is more effectually administered by indirect means than by the crowbars of consolation with which our friends, even the kindest, are apt to belabour our grief. According to some, people don't die, they don't fall ill, they don't change, everything always goes right. Some reproach us with our want of faith; others drag it forth—that silent sorrow that would fain lie half-asleep and resting in our hearts. Poor Dolly could not speak of George scarcely even to Robert. She sat very silently in the railway-carriage, her hands lying listlessly in her lap, while he refuted all the fears she had not even allowed herself to realise. This state of things annoyed Robert. He hated to see people dull and indifferent. It was distressing and tiresome too.

Few people were about when Robert and Dolly came across the great triumphant court of St. Thomas, with its gateways and many stony eyes and narrow doorways. They were on their way to All Saints', close by. The place seemed chiefly given over to laundresses. A freshman was standing under the arched gateway that leads to the inner

court; he was reading some neatly-written announcement in the glass shrine hanging outside the buttery. The oaken doors were closed. Robert, seeing a friend crossing the court, went away to speak to him. Dolly walked on a little, and stood by the railings, and the flight of steps that lead into the beautiful inner court of this great Palace of Art. She watched the many lines flowing in waves of stone, of mist. At the far end of the arched enclosure were iron-scrolled gates, with green and gold, and misty veils of autumn drifting in the gardens beyond. And then she remembered the summer's day when she last stood there with George, and as she thought of him suddenly his image came before her so distinctly that she almost called out his name. It was but an instant's impression; it was gone; the steps were Robert's; the image was in her own mind.

'Are you tired of waiting?' said Henley. 'Now, if you like we will go on to All Saints',' he said.

It seemed to Dolly as if she was looking at the old summer day, dimmed, silenced, saddened, seen through some darkened pane, as they went on together, passing under archways and galleries, and coming at last into the quaint and tranquil court that Dolly remembered so vividly. There she had stood; and there was George's staircase, and there was his name painted up, and there was his window with its lattice.

Robert went off for the key of George's room, and Dolly waited. It was so sweet, so sad, so tranquil, like the end of a long life. Dolly wandered in and out the narrow galleries; the silence of the place comforted her. She was glad to be alone a little bit, unconstrained, to feel as she felt, and not as she ought to feel; quietly despondent, not nervously confident, as they would all have her be. It was a crumbling, sweet, sunshiny sort of waking dream. Some gleams had broken through the clouds, and shone reflected

from the many lattice windows round about the little court. She heard some voices, and some young men hurried by, laughing as they went. They did not see the young lady with the sweet sad face standing under the gallery. Chrysanthemums were growing up against the wall, with faint lilac and golden heads, the last bright tints left upon the once gorgeous palette of summer. A delicate cool sky hung overhead, and the light was becoming brighter. Dolly passed an open door, and peeped in from the quaint gallery to a warm and darkened room, panelled and carpeted. It was dark and untenanted; a fire was burning in the grate.

'That is Fieldbrook's room; he will give us some tea presently,' said Robert, coming up; 'but now we can get into George's.'

Robert, who seemed to have keys for every keyhole, opened an oak door, and led the way up some stone steps. George's room was on the first floor. Henley went in first, opened the window, dragged forward a chair. 'If you will rest here,' he said, 'I will go and find Fieldbrook. They tell me he last heard from George. I have to speak to the Vice-Chancellor too.' Then he was gone again, after looking about to see that there was nothing he could do for her.

Dolly was glad to be alone. She sat down in George's three-sided chair, resting her head upon her hand. She was in his room. Everything in the place seemed to have a voice, and to speak to her—'George, George,' it all said. She looked out of the little window across the court. She could see the old windows of the library shining, and then she heard more voices, and more young men hurried by, with many footsteps.

Ever after, Dolly remembered that last half-hour spent in George's rooms *with* George: so it seemed to her looking back from a time when she had ceased to hope. She went to the writing-table, and mechanically began to straighten

the toys and pens lying on the cloth. There was the little dagger his mother had sent him from India years before; the desk she had given him out of her savings; and it occurred to her to open the lid, of which she knew the trick. She pushed the spring, and the top flew up with a sudden jerk, as it always did. Then Dolly saw that the box was full of papers hastily thrown in, verses, notes of lectures, and a letter torn through. 'Dearest Rh—' it began. She had no great shame looking over George's papers, a tear fell on the dear heap as she bent over the signs and ink-marks that told of her poor boy's trouble. What was this? a letter stamped and addressed to herself. Had it been thrown in with the rest by mistake? She tore it open hastily, with eager hands. He must have written the night of their water-party: it had no date:—

DEAREST DOLLY (said the crooked lines)—This is one more good-by, and one more service that I want you to do me; and you have never grudged any human being love or help. I am going, and before I go I shall make my will, and I shall leave what little I have—not to you—but to Rhoda, and will you see to this? I sometimes think she has not even a heart to help her through life; she will like my money better than me. It is quite late at night, but I cannot sleep; she comes and awakens me in my dreams. I shall go away from this as soon as the gates are open. It is no use struggling against my fate; others are giving their lives for a purpose, and I shall join them if I can. I have been flung from my anchor here, and the waves seem to close over me. If I live you will hear from me. Dearest old Dolly, take warning by me and don't expect too much. God bless you!

G. V.

Will you pay Miller at the boat-house 2*l.* 10*s.* I owe him? I think I have cleared up all other scores. I will leave the papers with him. I shall not come back here any more.

That was all. She was standing with her letter still in her hand, blankly looking at it, when the door opened and Tom Morgan came in. '"If I live." What did he mean? "Ask at the boat-house?"' She laid the letter down and went

on turning over the papers without noticing the young man.

Tom walked in with a broad grin and great volubility. 'Well!' said he, cheerfully, 'I thought it was you! I was walking with Magniac and some others, and noticed the windows open, and I saw you standing just where you are now, and I said to Magniac, "I know that lady." He wouldn't believe me; but I was right, knew I was. How are you and how is Lady Sarah? Where is George? When did he come back?' Then suddenly remembering some rumour to which he had paid but little heed at first, 'Nothing wrong, I hope?' said Tom.

'Tom! where is this?' said Dolly, without any preamble, in her old abrupt way, and she gave him a crumpled bill which she had been examining.

MR. VANBUG *to* J. MILLER—
To hieir of the *Wave* twelve hours.
To man's time, &c. &c.
To new coteing hir with tare, &c.

'I want to go there,' she said. 'Will you show me the way?'

'To the boat-house?' said Tom, doubtfully, looking at the bill. 'Miller's, you mean?'

She saw him hesitate.

'I must go,' she cried. 'You must take me. Is it Miller's? Show me the way, Tom.'

'Of course I can show you the way if you wish it,' said Tom.

He looked even more stupid than usual, but he did not like to refuse. He had to be in Hall by three o'clock, that was why he had hesitated. He had been thinking of his dinner; but Dolly began to tie on her bonnet. She hurried out, and ran downstairs, and he followed her across the court into the street. He was not loth to be seen walking

with so pretty a young lady. He nodded to several of his friends with velvet bands upon their gowns; a professor went by, Tom raised his well-worn cap.

Dolly might have been amused at any other time by the quaint mediæval ways of the old place.

It was out of term-time, but there had been some special meeting of the college magnates. Crimson coats and black, square caps and tassels, and quaint old things were passing. The fifteenth century was standing at a street corner. To-day heartily shook hands with 1500 and hurried on. Dolly saw it all without seeing it. Tom Morgan tried to give her the latest news.

'That is Brown,' said he, 'the new Professor of Modern Literature.' Dolly never even turned her head to look after Brown.

'There's Smith,' said Tom: 'they say he will be in the first six for the Mathematical Tripos.'

Then they came out of the busy High Street by a narrow lane, with brick walls on either side. It led to the mill by the river, and beyond the river spread a great country of water-meadows. It was a world, not of to-day or of 1500, but of all times and all hours. Pollards were growing at intervals, the river flowed by dull and sluggish, the land, too, seemed to flow dull and sluggish to meet a grey horizon. There were no animals to be seen, only these pollard-trees at intervals, and the spires of Cambridge crowding in the mist.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE POLLARD-TREES.

Next Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow—
His mantle hairy and his bonnet sedge,
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
Like to that sanguine flower inscribed with woe.
—LYCIDAS.

MISS VANBOROUGH walked on; she seemed to know the way by some instinct; sometimes she looked at the water, but it gave her a sort of vertigo. Tom looked at Dolly with some admiration as she passed along the bank, with her clear-cut face and stately figure, following the narrow pathway. They came at last to a bend of the river where some boats were lying high and dry in the grass, and where a little boat-house stood upon a sort of jutting-out island among tall trees upspringing suddenly in the waste: tall sycamore, ivy-grown stumps, greens of every autumnal shade, golden leaves dropping in lazy showers on the grass or drifting into the sluggish stream, along which they floated back to Cambridge once more. It was a deserted-looking grove, melancholy and romantic. But few people came there. But there was a ferryman and a black boat-house, and a flat ferry-boat anchored to the shore. Some bird gave a cry and flew past, otherwise the place was still with that peculiar river silence of tall weeds straggling, of trees drooping their green branches, of water lapping on the brink.

'Is this the place you wanted?' said Tom, 'or was it the other boat-house after all?'

Dolly walked on, without answering him. She beckoned to the boatman; and then, as he came towards her, her heart began to beat so that she could scarcely speak or ask the question that she had in her mind to ask. 'Has my brother been here? Where is his letter? Is the *Wave* safe in your little boat-house?' This was what she would have said, only she could not speak. Some strange fever had possessed her and brought her so far: now her strength and courage suddenly forsook her, and she stopped short, and stood holding to an old rotten post that stood by the river-side.

'Take care,' said Tom; 'that ain't safe. You might fall in, and the river is deep just here.'

She turned such a pale face to him that the young man suddenly began to wonder if there was more in it all than he had imagined.

'It's perfectly safe I mean,' he said. 'Why, you don't mean to say ——'

He turned red; he wished with all his heart that he had never brought her there—that he could jump into the river—that he had stayed to dine in Hall. To his unspeakable relief unexpected help appeared.

'Why, there is Mr. Raban!' said Tom, as Raban came out of the boat-house, and walked across under the trees to meet them.

Dolly waited for the two men to come up to her, as she stood by her stump among the willow-trees. Raban did not seem surprised to see her. He took no notice of Tom, but he walked straight up to Dolly.

'You have come,' he said; 'I had just sent you a telegraphic message.'

His manner was so kind and so gentle that it frightened her more than if he had spoken with his usual coldness.

'What is it?' she said, 'and why have you come here? Have you too heard . . .?'

She scanned his face anxiously.

Then she looked from him to the old boatman, who was standing a few steps off in his shabby red flannel-shirt, with a stolid brown face and white hair: a not unpicturesque figure standing by the edge of the stream. Winds and rain and long seasons had washed all expression out of old Miller's bronzed face.

'George came here on Tuesday,' said Raban to Dolly; 'I only heard of it this morning. Miller tells me he gave him a letter or a paper to keep.'

'I know it,' said Dolly, turning to the old boatman. 'I am Mr. Vanborough's sister; I have come for the letter,' she said quickly, and she held out her hand.

'This gentleman come and asked me for the paper,' said the old man, solemnly, 'and he stands by to contradict me if I speak false; but if the right party as was expected to call should wish for to see it, my wish is to give satisfaction all round,' said the old man. 'I knows your brother well, Miss, and he know me, and my man too, for as steady a young man and all one could wish to see. The gentleman come up quite hearty one morning, and ask Bill and me as a favour to hisself to sign the contents of the paper; and he seal it up, and it is safe, as you see, with the seal compact;' and then from his pockets came poor George's packet, a thin blue paper folded over, and sealed with his ring. 'Mr. Vanbug he owe me two pound twelve and sixpence,' old Miller went on, still grasping his paper as if loth to give it up, 'and he said as how you would pay the money, Miss.'

Dolly's hands were fumbling at her purse in a moment.

'I don't want nothing for my trouble,' said the old fellow. 'I knows Mr. Vanbug well, and I thank you, Miss, and you will find it all as the gentleman wished, and good-morning,'

said old Miller, trudging hastily away, for a passenger had hailed him from the opposite shore.

'I know what it is,' said Dolly. 'See, he has written my name upon it, Mr. Raban: it is his will. He told me to come here. He is gone. I found his letter.' She began to quiver. 'I don't know what he means.'

'Don't be frightened,' said Raban smiling, and very kindly. 'He was seen at Southampton quite well and in good spirits. He has enlisted. That is what he means. You have interest, we must get him a commission; and if this makes him more happy, it is surely for the best.'

'Perhaps you are right,' she said, struggling not to cry. 'How did you hear? How kind you have been. How shall we ever thank you!' Her colour was coming and going.

'It was a mere chance,' Raban said. (It was one of those chances that come to people who have been working unremittingly to bring a certain result to pass.) 'Don't thank me,' he continued in a low voice; 'you have never understood how glad I am to be allowed to feel myself your friend sometimes.'

Raban might have said more, but he looked up, and saw Robert's black face frowning down upon them. Robert was the passenger who had hailed old Miller. For an instant Frank had forgotten that Robert existed. He turned away hastily, and went and stared into the water at a weed floating by. The old boatman waiting by the punt sat on the edge of the shore, watching the little scene, and wondering what the pretty lady's tears might be about. Tom also assisted, open-mouthed—the Morgan family were not used to tears. Mrs. Morgan never cried; not even when Tom broke his leg upon the ice.

Robert was greatly annoyed. He had come all the way, along the opposite bank, looking for Dolly, who had not waited for him; who had gone off without a word from the

place where he had expected to find her. Not even her incoherent 'Oh, Robert, I am so sorry—I have heard, Mr. Raban has heard—he has found George for us!' not even her trustful, gentle look, as she sprang to meet him, seemed to mollify him. He looked anything but sympathising as he said, 'I have been looking for you everywhere.'

('Brown must have told him,' thought Tom Morgan, who was wondering how he had found them out.)

'You really must not run off in this way. I told you all along that all this—a—anxiety was quite unnecessary. George is well able to take care of himself. If I had not met Professor Brown, I really don't know now ——'

'But what is to be done, Robert? Listen,' interrupted Dolly. 'He has enlisted; he was at Southampton yesterday.'

And together they told Henley what had happened. Robert took it very coolly.

'Of course he has turned up,' said Robert, 'and we must now take the matter into our own hands, and see what is best to be done. I really think' (with a laugh) 'he has done the best thing he could do.'

Dolly was hurt again by his manner. Raban had said the same thing, but it had not jarred upon her.

'I see you do not agree with me,' continued Robert. 'Perhaps, Raban, you will give me the name of the person who recognised George Vanborough? I will see him myself.'

'He is a man whom we all know,' said Raban, gravely,—'Mr. Penfold, my late wife's father,' and he looked Robert full in the face.

Dolly wondered why Robert flushed and looked uncomfortable.

'Come,' he said, suddenly drawing her hand through his arm with some unnecessary violence, 'shall we walk back, Dora? There are some other things which I must see about,

and I should be glad to consult you immediately.' And he would have walked away at once, but she hung back for a moment to say one more grateful word to Frank.

Then Robert impatiently dragged her off, and Raban, with his foot, kicked at a stone that happened to be lying in the path, and it fell with a circling plash into the river.

Meanwhile, Robert was walking away, and poor Dolly, who had not yet recovered from her agitation, was stumbling alongside, weary and breathless. He had her arm in his; he was walking very rapidly; she could hardly keep up with his strides.

This was the moment chosen by Robert Henley to say: — 'I want you now to bring your mind to something which concerns myself, Dora, and you. I came here to-day, not only to please you, but also because I had business to attend to. The Vice-Chancellor has, really in the most pleasant and flattering manner, been speaking to me about my appointment, and I have brought a letter for you.'

'I am so confused, Robert,' said Dolly.

'I will read it to you, then,' said Robert; and immediately, in a clear, trumpet-like voice, he began to do so, stopping every now and then to give more emphasis to his sentences.

The letter was from the Board of Management of the College of Boggleywollah. They seemed to be in a difficulty. The illness of Mr. Martindale had already caused great delay and inconvenience; the number of applications had never been so numerous; the organisation never so defective. In the event of Mr. Henley's being able to anticipate his departure by three weeks, the Board was empowered to offer him a quarter's additional salary, dating from Midsummer instead of from Michaelmas: it would be a very great assistance to them if he could fall in with this proposal. A few lines of entreaty from Mr. Martindale were added.

'It will have to come sooner or later,' said Henley; 'it is unfortunate everything happening just now. My poor Dora, I am so sorry for all the anxiety you have had,' he said, 'and yet I am not sure that this is the best thing that could happen under the circumstances;' and he attempted to take her hand and draw her to him.

Dolly stood flushed and troubled, and unresponding. She hardly took Robert's meaning in, so absorbed had she been in other thoughts. For a moment after he spoke she stood looking away across the river to the plain beyond.

'The college must wait,' said she, wearily; then suddenly—'You know I couldn't leave them now, Aunt Sarah and every one, and you, Robert, couldn't leave me. Don't let us talk about it!'

Robert did not answer immediately. 'It is no use,' he said deliberately, 'shirking disagreeable subjects. My dearest Dora, life has to be faced, and one's day's work has to be done. My work is to organise the College at Boggleywollah; you must consider that; and a woman's work is to follow her husband. Every woman, when she marries, must expect to give up her old ties and associations, or there could be no possible union otherwise; and my wife can be no exception to the general rule ——'

'Robert, don't talk in this way,' said Dolly, passionate and nervous. 'I don't want you to frighten me.'

'You are unreasonable again, dearest,' said Robert, in his usual formula. 'You must be patient, and let me settle for us both.'

Robert might have been more touched if Dolly had spoken less angrily and decidedly.

'If I put off going,' said Robert, soothingly, 'I lose a great deal more than a quarter's salary—I lose the prestige; the great advantage of finding Martindale. I lose three months, which in the present state of affairs may cause irreparable hindrance.

Three months?—six months! Lady Sarah's illness may last any indefinite period: who can say how long it may last? and Lady Sarah herself, I am convinced, would never wish you to change your plans, and your mother will soon have her husband to protect her. You would not have the heart to send me off alone, Dolly. Is the alternative so very painful to you?' he said again. And Robert smiled with a calm and not very anxious expression, and looking down at her.

Suddenly it all rushed over Dolly. He was in earnest!—in earnest!—impossible. He meant her to go off now,—directly—without seeing George; without hearing from him again; while her aunt was lying on her sick bed. How could she go? He should not have asked such a sacrifice. She did not pause to think.

'No, a thousand times no, Robert!' she cried passionately. 'You *can't* go. If you love me, stay,' she said, with great agitation. 'I know you love me. I know you will do as I wish—as it is right to do. Don't go. Dearest Robert, you *mustn't* go.' Her voice faltered; she spoke in her old soft tone, with imploring looks, and trembling hands put out. Robert Henley might have hesitated, but the '*must not*' had spoilt it all.

'You know what pain it gives me to refuse your request,' said Robert; 'but I have considered the subject as anxiously on your account as mine. I—really I cannot give up my career at this juncture. You have promised to come with me. If you love me you will not hesitate. You can do your aunt no real good by remaining. You can do George no good; and, besides, you belong to me,' said Robert, growing more and more annoyed. 'As I told you before, I must now be your first consideration; otherwise ——' He stopped.

'Otherwise what?' said Dolly.

'Otherwise you would not be happy as my wife,' he said,

beating his foot upon the gravel, and looking steadily before him.

'Robert!' said Dolly, blushing up, 'you would not wish me to be ungrateful.'

'To whom?' said Robert. 'You propose to postpone everything indefinitely, at a time when I had fully calculated upon being settled in life; when I had accepted an appointment chiefly with a view to our speedy marriage. There is no saying how long your conscience may detain us,' cried Henley, getting more and more provoked; 'nor how many people may fall ill, nor how often George may think proper to make off. You do not perceive how matters stand, dear Dora.'

Was this all he had to say? Her heart began to beat with a swift emotion.

'I understand you quite well,' she said, in a low voice. 'But, Robert, I, too, have made up my mind, and I cannot leave them, not even for you. You should never have asked it of me,' she cried, with pardonable indignation.

'I am not aware that I have ever asked anything that was not for your good as well as my own,' said Henley, in an offended tone. 'I begin to think you have never loved me, Dora, or you would not reproach me with my love for you. Who has influenced you?' said he, jealously. 'What does it all mean?'

She stopped short, and stood looking at him steadily, wistfully—not as she used to look once, but with eyes that seemed to read him through and through, until the tears came once more to blind their keen sight.

Raban, who had crossed by the ferry, and who was walking back along the opposite side, saw the two standing by the river-side, a man and a woman, with a plain beyond, and a city beyond the plain.

The sun was setting sadly grey and russet; the long day's

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mists dispersing; light clouds were slowly rising; turf and leaves stood out against the evening; it was all clear and sweet, and faintly coloured: a tranquil peace seemed to have fallen everywhere. It was not radiance, but peace and subdued calm. Who does not know these evenings? are they sad? are they happy? A break in the shadow. A passing medley of the lights of heaven and earth, of sweet winds and rising vapours. . . . The cool breeze came blowing into their faces, and Dolly turned her head away and looked across the river to the opposite bank. When she spoke again she was her old self once more.

She was quite calm now; her eyes no longer wet. 'Robert,' she said, 'I have something to tell you. I have been thinking things over, and I see that it is right that you should go; but it is also right that I should stay,' said Dolly, looking him steadily in the face; 'and perhaps in happier times you will let me come to you, or come back for me, and you must not—you will not—think I do not love you because of this.'

What was it in her voice that seemed to haunt him—to touch, to thrill that common-place man for one instant into some emotion? She was so simple and so sad; she looked so fair and wistful.

But it was only for an instant. 'Do you mean that you wish to break the engagement?' he asked in his coldest voice.

'If we love each other what does it matter that we are free?' said Dorothea, with a very sweet look in her face. 'You need fear no change in me,' she said, 'but I want you to be free.' Her voice failed, and she began to walk on quickly.

'Remember, it is your own doing,' she heard him say, as Tom Morgan, who had lingered behind, caught them up. 'But we will speak of all this again,' he added.

Dolly bent her head, she could not trust herself to answer.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THUS FAR THE MILES ARE MEASURED FROM THY FRIEND.

> If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange,
> And be all to me? Shall I never miss
> Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss
> That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,
> When I look up, to drop on a new range
> Of walls and floors, another home than this?
>
> —E. B. Browning.

The three came back to All Saints' by many a winding way. Raban met them at the college gate in his rusty black gown; he had to attend some college meeting after chapel. Two or three young men were standing about expecting them.

'You will find the tea is all ready,' said Fieldbrook, gaily; 'are you sure, Miss Vanborough, that you would not like something more substantial? My bedmaker has just been here to ask whether you were an elderly lady, and whether you would wish your bread-and-butter cut thick or thin? Let me introduce Mr. Magniac, Mr. Smith, Mr. Irvine, Mr. Richmond; Mr. Morgan you know.'

Dolly smiled. The young men led her back across the court (as she crossed it the flowers were distilling their colours in the evening light); they opened the oak door of the very room she had looked into in the morning, and stood back to let her pass. The place had been prepared for her coming. Tea was laid, and a tower of bread-and-butter stood in the middle of the table. Books were cleared away,

some flowers were set out in a cup. Fieldbrook heaped on the coals and made the tea, while Raban brought her the arm-chair to rest in. It was a pretty old oak-panelled room beneath the library. A little flat kettle was boiling on the fire; the young men stood round about, kind and cheery: Dolly was touched and comforted by their kindness, and they, too, were charmed with her sweet natural grace and beauty.

It was difficult not to compare this friendly courtesy and readiness with Robert's coldness. There was Raban ready to do her bidding at any hour; here was Mr. Fieldbrook emptying the whole canister into the teapot to make her a cup of tea; Smith had rushed off to order a fly for her. Robert stood silent and black by the chimney; he never moved, nor seemed to notice her presence. If she looked at him he turned his head away, and yet he saw her plainly enough. He saw Raban too. Frank was standing behind Dolly's chair in the faint green light of the old oriel window. It tinted his old black gown and Dolly's shadowy head as she leant back against the oaken panel. One of the young men thought of an ivory head he had once seen set in a wooden frame. As for Frank, he knew that for him a pale ghost would henceforth haunt that oriel—a fair, western ghost, with anxious eyes, that were now following Robert as he crossed the room with measured steps and went to look out for the fly.

As he left the room, they all seemed to breathe more freely. Tom Morgan and Mr. Magniac began a series of jokes; Mr. Richmond poked the fire; Mr. Irvine opened the window. Raban sat down by Dolly, and began telling her of a communication he had had from Yorkshire, from his old grandfather, who seemed disposed to take him into favour again, and who wanted him to go back and manage the estate.

'I am very much exercised about it,' said Frank. 'It is going into the land of bondage, you know. The old couple have used me very ill.'

'But of course you must go to them,' said Dolly, trying to be interested, and to forget her own perplexities. 'We shall miss you dreadfully, but you must go.'

'You will not miss me as I shall miss you,' said Frank.

And as he spoke, Robert's head appeared at the window.

'The fly is come; don't keep it waiting, Dora,' said Robert, impatiently.

'And you will let me know if ever I can do anything for you?' persisted Frank, in defiance of Henley's black looks.

'Of course I will. I shall never forget your kindness,' said Dolly, quickly putting on her shawl.

The bells were clanging all over the place for an evening service. Doors were banging, voices calling, figures came flitting from every archway.

'There goes the reader! he is late,' said Tom Morgan, as a shrouded form darted across their path. Then he pointed out the Rector, a stately figure in a black and rustling silk, issuing from a side door; and then Rector, friendly young men, arches, gable-ends had vanished, and Dolly and Robert were driving and jolting through the streets together, jolting along through explanation and misunderstanding, and over one another's susceptibilities, and over chance ruts and stones on their way to the station. He began immediately:

'We were interrupted in our talk just now; but I have really very little more to say. If you are dissatisfied, if you really wish to break off your engagement, it is much better to say so at once, without making me appear ridiculous before all those men. Perhaps,' said Henley, 'we may have both made some great mistake, and you have seen some one whom you would prefer to myself?'

'You must not say such things, Robert,' answered Dolly,

with some emotion. 'You know how unhappy I am. I only want you to let me love you. What more can I say?'

'Your actions and your words scarcely agree, then,' said Henley, jealous and implacable. 'I confess I shall be greatly surprised, on my return from India at some indefinite period, to find you still in the same mind. I myself make no professions of extra constancy ——'

'Oh, you are too cruel,' cried poor Dolly, exasperated.

'Will you promise me never to see Raban, for instance?' said Robert.

'How can I make such a promise?' cried Dolly, indignant. 'To turn off a kind friend for an unjust fancy! If you trust me, Robert, you must believe what I say. Anyhow, you are free. Only remember that I shall trust in your love until you yourself tell me that you no longer care for me.'

The carriage stopped as she spoke. Robert got out and helped her down, produced the tickets, and paid the flyman.

The two went back in a dreary *tête-à-tête*; she wanted a heart's sympathy, and he placed a rug at her feet and pulled up the carriage window for fear of a draught. She could not thank him, nor look pleased. Her head ached, her heart ached; one expression of love, one word of faithful promise would have made the world a different place, but he had not spoken it. He had taken her at her word. She was to be bound, and he was to be free. The old gentleman opposite never looked at them, but instantly composed himself to sleep; the old lady in the corner thought she had rarely seen a more amiable and attentive young man, a more ungracious young lady.

Once only Robert made any allusion to what had passed. 'There will be no need to enter into explanations at present,' he said, in a somewhat uneasy manner. 'You may change your mind, Dora.'

'I shall never change my mind,' said Dolly, wearily, 'but it is no use troubling mamma and Aunt Sarah; I will tell them that I am not going away. They shall know all when you are gone.'

Dolly might have safely told Mrs. Palmer, who was not often disquieted by other people's sacrifices. With Lady Sarah it was different. But she was ill, and she had lost her grasp of life. She asked no question, only she seemed to revive from the day when Dolly told her that she was not going to leave her. It was enough for her that the girl's hand was in hers.

What is Dolly thinking of, as she stands by the sick bed, holding the frail hand? To what future does it guide her? Is it to that which Dolly has sometimes imagined contained within the walls of a home; simple, as some people's lives are, and hedged with wholesome briers, and darling home-ties, and leading straight, with great love and much happiness and sacred tears, to the great home of love? or is it to a broad way, unhedged, unfenced, with a distant horizon, a way unsheltered in stormy weather, easily missed, but wide and free and unshackled? . . .

Mrs. Palmer, who troubled herself little about the future, was for ever going off to Dean's Yard, where the Henleys were comfortably established. The eldest daughter was married, but there were two lively girls still at home; there were young officers coming and going about the place. There was poor Jonah preparing to depart on his glorious expedition. He was in good spirits, he had a new uniform. One day, hearing his aunt's voice, he came in to show himself, accoutred and clanking with chains. He was disappointed to find that Dolly was not there as he had expected. Bell admired loudly, but her mother almost screamed to him to go and take the hideous thing off. The dry, brisk-tongued little woman was feeling his departure very acutely. She

still made an effort to keep up her old cynical talk, but she broke down, poor soul, again and again; she had scarcely spirit left to contradict Philippa, or even to forbid her the house.

The first time she had seen Dolly, she had been prepared to criticise the girl; Norah and Bell were more cordial, but Lady Henley offered her niece a kid glove and a kid cheek, and was slightly disappointed to find that Dolly's frivolity, upon which she had been descanting all the way to Church House, consisted in an old grey gown and a black apron, and in two black marks under her eyes, for poor Dolly had not had much sleep after that dismal talk with Robert. This was the day after the Cambridge expedition. Miss Vanborough was looking very handsome, notwithstanding the black marks, and she unconsciously revenged herself upon Lady Henley by a certain indifference and pre-occupation, which seemed to put her beyond the reach of that lady's passing shafts; but one of them wounded her at last.

'I suppose Lady Sarah will be left to servants when you go?' says Lady Henley. 'Your mother is certainly not to be counted on; Hawtry is a much better nurse than she is. Poor dear Philippa! she sees everything reflected in a looking-glass. Your school is a different one altogether from our plain, old-fashioned country ways.'

Dolly looked surprised; she had not deserved this unprovoked attack from the little gaily-dressed lady perched upon the sofa. Norah was very much distressed by her mother's rudeness; Bell was struggling with a nervous inclination to giggle, which was the effect it always produced upon her.

'I have no doubt mamma would take care of my aunt if it were necessary,' said Dolly, blushing with annoyance. 'But I am not going away,' she said. 'Robert and I have settled

that it is best I should stay behind. We have made up our minds to part.'

The two girls were listening open-eared. 'Then she has never cared for him, after all,' thought Bell.

But Lady Henleyknew better: notwithstanding a more than usual share of jealousy and cross-grainedness, she was not without a heart. Dolly's last words had been spoken very quietly, but they told the whole story. 'My dear,' said the little woman, jumping up suddenly and giving her a kiss, 'I did not know this' (there were tears shining among the new green bonnet-strings)—'my trial is close at hand. You must forgive me, I—I am very unhappy.' She made a struggle, and recovered herself quickly, but from that minute Dolly and her Aunt Joanna were good friends.

The next time Robert called in Dean's Yard he was put through a cross-examination by Lady Henley. 'When was he coming back for Dolly? what terms were they on?' Sir Thomas came in to hear all about it, and then Jonah sauntered in. 'Only wish I could get a chance,' said Jonah. Robert felt disinclined to give Jonah the chance he wished for. Lady Henley was now praising Dolly as much as she had abused her before, and Robert agreed to everything. But he gave no clue to the state of his mind. He was surprised to find how entirely Lady Henley ignored his feelings and sympathised with Dolly's determination to remain behind. He walked away thinking that it was far from his intention to break entirely with Dolly, but he had not forgiven her yet; he was not sorry to feel his liberty in his own hands again. He meant to come back, but he chose to do it of his own free will, and not because he was bound by any promise.

As for Dolly, she was absorbed, she was not feeling very much just then, she had been overwrought and overstrained. A dull calm had succeeded to her agitation, and besides Robert was not yet gone.

CHAPTER XL.

UNDER THE CLOCK-TOWER.

I will tell you when they parted.
When plenteous autumn sheaves were brown,
Then they parted heavy-hearted.
The full rejoicing sun looked down
As grand as in the days before:
Only to them those days of yore
Could come back nevermore.
—C. ROSSETTI.

AN archway leads out of the great thoroughfare from Westminster Bridge into the sudden silence of Dean's Yard, where Sir Thomas had taken the house of a country neighbour. It stood within the cloisters of the Abbey, over-towered, over-clocked, with bells pealing high overhead (ringing the hours away, the poor mother used to think). Dolly found time one day to come for half-an-hour to see Jonah before he left. She had a great regard for him. She had also found a staunch friend in Norah with the grey eyes like her own. Bell told Dolly in confidence that her mother had intended Robert to marry Norah, but this had not at all interfered with the two girls' liking for one another. Mrs. Palmer, who was going on farther, set Dolly down at the archway, and as the girl was crossing the Yard she met Robert coming from the house. He was walking along by the railing, and among the dead leaves that were heaped there by the wind. Dolly's heart always began to beat now when she saw Robert. This time he met her, and, with

something of his old manner, said, 'Are you in a hurry? Will you come with me a little way? I have something to say.' And he turned into the cloister: she followed him at once.

From Dean's Yard, one gateway leads to common life and to the day's work, struggling by with creaks and whips and haste; another gateway brings you to a cloister arched, silent. The day's work is over for those who are lying in the peaceful enclosure. A side door from this cloister leads into the Abbey, where, among high piles and burning windows, and the shrill sweet echoes of the Psalms, a silent voice sometimes speaks of something beyond rest, beyond our feeble mode of work and praise, and our music and Gothic types—of that which is, but which we are not.

The afternoon service was pealing on and humming within the Abbey as Dolly and Robert walked slowly along the cloister. He was silent a long time. She tried to ask him what he had to say, but she found it difficult to speak to him now. She was shy, and she scarcely knew upon what terms they were: she did not care to know. She had said that he should be free, and she meant it, and she was too generous to seek to extort unwilling promises from him, or to imply that she was disappointed that he had given none.

At last Robert spoke. 'Dolly, shall you write to me?' he said.

'Yes, Robert, if you wish it,' she answered, simply. 'I should like to write to you.'

As she looked at him, fair and blushing, Robert said suddenly, 'Tell me, Dora, have you never regretted your decision?'

Dolly turned away—she could not meet his eyes. Hers fell upon a slab to the memory of some aged woman, who had, perhaps, gone through some such experience before she had been turned into a stone. Dolly was anything but

stone. Tears slowly gathered in her eyes, and Robert saw them, and caught hold of her hand, and at that minute there came some pealing echo of an organ, and of voices bursting into shrill amens. All her life Dolly remembered that strange moment of parting, for parting she felt it to be. She must tell him the truth. She turned. 'No, Robert—never once,' she said; 'although it is even harder than I thought to let you go.'

They were standing by the door at the end of the first cloister. For the last time he might have spoken then, and told her that he only loved her the more, that distance was nothing to him, that time was nothing; but the service had come to an end, and while he hesitated a verger came out in his black gown, and the congregation followed—one or two strangers, then Jonah and Bell, with red eyes both of them, looking foolish somehow, and ashamed of being seen; then more strangers, and then with the last remaining verger, came Rhoda and Zoe Morgan, who sometimes went to church at the Abbey. They all joined the young couple and walked back to the house with them.

This was Dolly's last chance for an explanation with her cousin. The time was drawing to an end, fate came in between them now, for this very afternoon it was settled rather suddenly, at Sir Thomas's request, that Robert and Jonah should go as far as Marseilles together. This was Thursday, and the young men were to start on the Saturday evening.

Lady Henley bore up very well at first, and clenched her teeth, and said they should all come to dinner on Friday.

'It is no use sitting alone and crying one's eyes out,' said the poor woman valiantly, and she made Sir Thomas ask a couple of Yorkshire friends to the feast. One was a county hero, in great favour with Bell. The other was Mr.

Anley, Jonah's godfather. He had a great affection for the family, and regularly dined with them upon grave crises and great occasions.

Lady Henley, being liberal in her hospitality, ordered in her viands and her champagne-bottles, and the girls went to Covent Garden and bought fruit and pineapples and autumn flowers to dress the table, and poor Jonah brought in a great baked pie from Gunter's.

'It's pâté-de-foie-gras,' said he. 'My father likes it. I thought I might as well have it to celebrate the occasion.' And he held it up triumphantly.

Poor Lady Henley had almost overrated her powers of endurance, for she looked into his honest sallow face, and then suddenly got up and rushed out of the room.

'Go to her, Jonah,' said the girls, looking very pale.

Jonah came down after a little while with a very red nose, and then he went out again to buy something else. All day long he kept coming and going in cabs, bringing home one thing after another—a folding-chair, a stick to open out suddenly, a whole kitchen battery fitted into a tea-kettle, brooches for the girls, toys for his eldest sister's children. As for the contrivances, they served to make one evening pass a little less heavily, and amused them for the time, and gave them something to talk about. But soon after, all poor Jonah's possessions went down in the Black Sea, in an ill-fated ship, that foundered with far more precious freight on board than tin pans and folding-chairs.

Punctual to her time on the Friday, Lady Henley was there to receive her guests in her stiffest silks, laces, and jewels, looking like some battered fetish out of a shrine, as she sat at the head of the table.

Dolly came to dinner sorely against her will, but she was glad she had come when she saw how Jonah brightened up,

and when the poor little wooden mother held up her face and kissed her.

Lady Henley said, 'How do you do?' to her guests, but never spoke to any of them. It was a dreary feast. Robert failed at the last moment, and they sat down to a table with a gap where his place should have been. No one ate the pie except Sir Thomas, who swallowed a little bit with a gulp; then he called for champagne, and his face turned very red, and he looked hard at his son, and drank a long draught.

Jonah quickly filled his glass, and muttered something as he tossed it off. He had got his mother's hand under the table in his long bony fingers. Lady Henley was sitting staring fixedly before her. As Jonah drank their healths, Norah gave a little gasp. Mr. Anley took snuff. One of the country neighbours, young Mr. Jack Redmayne, whom Miss Bell used to meet striding, riding, and walking round about Smokethwaite, had begun a story about some celebrated mare; he paused for an instant, then suddenly rallying, went on and on with it, although nobody was listening, not even Miss Bell.

'I thought it best to go on talking,' he said afterwards. 'I hope they don't think it unfeeling. I'm sure I don't know what I said. I put my horse a dozen times over the same gate; even old Firefly wouldn't stand such treatment.' So the dinner went on; the servants creaked about, and the candles burnt bright, but no one could rally, and Lady Henley was finally obliged to leave the table.

Immediately after dinner came old Sam with his cab, and Dolly and her mother got up to go.

'I cannot think what possessed Joanna to give that funeral-feast,' said Mrs. Palmer, as they were putting on their cloaks.

'Hush, mamma,' said Dolly, for Jonah was coming run-

ning and tumbling downstairs breathless from his mother's room.

'Look here, Dolly,' he said: 'mother wants you to come and see her to-morrow after I am gone, and don't let her worry too much, and would you please take this?' he said. 'Please do.'

This was a pretty little crystal watch that he had bought for her, and when Dolly hesitated and exclaimed, he added, entreatingly, 'It is my wedding present. I thought in case we never—I mean that I should like to give it to you myself,' he said.

'Oh! Jonah,' Dolly answered in a low voice, 'perhaps I may never want a wedding present.'

'Never mind, keep it,' said Jonah, staring at her hand, 'and I'll look up George the first thing. You know my father has written to his colonel. Keep a good heart, Dolly; we are all in the same boat.'

He stood watching the cab as it drove away under the stars.

Dolly was not thinking of Jonah any more. She saw looking at all the passers-by, still hoping to see Robert.

'He ought to have come, mamma, this last night?' she said.

'My dear, do you ever expect a man to think of anything but his own convenience?' said Mrs. Palmer, with great emphasis.

'Oh! mamma, why must one ever say good-by?' said Dolly, going on with her own thoughts.

'I believe, even now he might persuade you to run off with him,' said Mrs. Palmer, laughing. . . . .

It was over. He was gone. He had come and gone. Dolly had both dreaded and longed to be alone with Robert, but her mother had persistently stayed in the room. It was about four o'clock when he came, and Dolly left her aunt's bed-

side and came down to the summons, and stood for an instant at the drawing-room door. She could hear his voice within. She held the door-handle, as she stood dizzy and weary. She thought of the Henleys parting from their son, and envied them. Ah! how much easier to part where love is a certainty; and now this was the last time—and he was going, and she loved him, and she had sent him away, and he had never said one word of regret, nor promised once to come back.

She had offered to set him free; she had said she could not leave them all. At this moment, in her heart, Dolly felt as if she *could* have left them; and as if Robert, in going and in ceasing to love her, was taking away all the light and the strength of her life. He seemed to be making into a certainty that which she had never believed until now, and proving to her by his deeds that his words were true, although she had refused to believe them. She had given him a heart out of her own tender heart, a soul out of her own loving imagination, and now where were her imaginations? Some dry blast seemed to her to be beating about the place, choking her parched throat and drying her tears. Her eyes were dull and heavy-lidded; her face looked pale and frightened as she opened the door and walked in. 'Dolly is so strong,' Mrs. Palmer was saying, 'she has courage for us all. I do not fear for her.'

'Perhaps it is best as it is,' Henley answered a little hurriedly. 'I shall go out solely with a view to making money, and come home all the sooner. It is certainly better not to disturb Lady Sarah with leave-takings.'

He looked up and saw Dolly coming across the room, and was shocked by the girl's pale face.

'My dearest Dora,' said Henley, going to meet her, 'how ill you look; you would never have been fit for the journey.'

'Perhaps not,' said Dolly. She was quite passive, and let him hold her hand, but a cold shadow of bitterness seemed to have fallen upon her. It was a chilly August day. They had lit a small wood fire, and they now brought some coffee to warm Robert before he left. Robert was very much moved, for him.

He put down his coffee-cup untasted, and stood by the tall chimney looking down into the fire. Then he looked at his watch, and went up to his aunt and said good-by, and then he came and stood opposite Dolly, who was by the window, and looked her steadily in the face. She could not look up, though she felt his eyes upon her, and he kissed her. 'God bless you,' he said, deserting his post with a prayer, as people do sometimes, and without looking back once, he walked out of the room.

Robert left the room. Dolly stood quite still where he had left her; she heard the servants' voices outside in the hall, the carriage starting off, some one calling after it, but the wheels rolled on. She stood dully looking through the window at some birds that were flying across the sky. There were cloud heaps sailing, and dead leaves blowing along the terrace, the bitter parching wind was still blowing. It was not so much the parting as the manner of it. She had thought it so simple to love and to be loved; she had never believed that a word would change him. Was it her fault? Had she been cold, unkind? She was very young still, she longed for one word of sympathy. She turned to her mother with a sudden impulse.

'Oh, mamma!' she said, piteously.

'I cannot think how you can have been so hard-hearted, Dolly,' said her mother. '*I* could not have let him go alone. How long the time will seem, poor fellow! Yes, you have been very tyrannical, Dolly.'

Was this all the comfort Mrs. Palmer had to give?

Something seemed choking in Dolly's throat; was it her hard heart that was weighing so heavily?

'Oh! mamma, what could I do?' she said. 'I told him he was free: he knows that I love him, but indeed he is free.'

Mrs. Palmer uttered an impatient exclamation. She had been wandering up and down the room. She stopped short.

'Free! what do you mean. You have never said one word to me. What *have* you been about? Do you mean that he may never come back to you?'

But Dolly scarcely heard her mother's words. The door had opened and some one came in. Never come back? This was Robert himself who was standing there. He had come to say one more farewell. He went straight up to her and he caught her in his arms. 'There was just time,' he said. 'Good-by once more, dearest Dora!' It was but a moment; it was one of those moments that last for a life-time. Dolly lived upon it for many a day to come. He loved her, she thought to herself, or he would never have come back to her, and if he loved her the parting had lost its sting.

CHAPTER XLI.

I BRING YOU THREE LETTERS — I PRAY YOU READ ONE.

Nay, if you read this line,
Remember not the hand that writ it.

THE partings were over. Dolly lived upon that last farewell for many a day to come. Such moments are states, and not mere measures of life. Everything else was sad enough. Lady Sarah still lingered. Poor little Lady Henley in her home in Dean's Yard was yellow and silent, and fierce in her anxiety. What was it to her that Sebastopol was to fall before the victorious armies if the price she had to pay was the life of her son? She kept up as best she could, but the strain told upon her health and her temper. Sir Thomas kept meekly out of the way. The servants trembled and gave warning; the daughters could not give warning. Woe betide Norah if she were late for breakfast. Ill-fated Bell used to make *mal-àpropos* speeches, which were so sternly vented upon her that she used to go off in tears to her father. Sir Thomas himself was in an anxious, unsettled state, coming and going from his desk, poring over maps and papers, and the first of those awful broadsheets of fated names overcame him completely. He burnt the paper, and would not let it go upstairs; but how keep out the lurid gleam of Victory that was spreading over the country? Her flaming sword hung over all their heads by one single thread; it was the life of one man against the whole campaign for

many of them. Hoarse voices would come shouting and shrieking in the streets; there was but one thought in everybody's mind. All day long it seemed in the air, and a nightmare in the darkness. Poor Sir Thomas had no heart to go out, and used to sit gloomily in a little back study, with a wire blind, and four pairs of boots, and *The Times* and a blotted cheque-book; he determined at last to take his wife home to Yorkshire again. There at least some silence was to be found among the moors and the rocky ridges, and some seeming of peace.

But for a long time Lady Henley refused to go. She was nearer Jonah in London, she said. The post came in one day sooner. It must have brought news to many an anxious home. What letters they are, those letters written twenty years ago, with numbed fingers, in dark tents, on chill battle-fields, in hospital wards. All these correspondents are well and in good heart, according to their own accounts. They don't suffer much from their wounds; they don't mind the cold; they think of the dear people at home, and write to them after a weary night's watch, or a fierce encounter, in the gentlest words of loving remembrance. The dying man sends his love and a recommendation for some soldier's children or widow at home; the strong man is ready to meet his fate, and is full of compassion for suffering. 'I am writing on poor ——'s sabretache. I am keeping it for his brother at home,' says one. Another has been to see his sick friend, and sends cheering accounts of his state. Then, too, we may read, if we choose, the hearty, ill-spelt correspondence of the common soldiers, all instinct with the same generous and simple spirit. There are also the proclamations of the generals. The French announce: 'The hour is come to fight, to conquer, to triumph over the demoralised columns of the enemy. The enterprise is great and worthy of their heroism. Providence appears to be on

their side, as well as an immense armament of guns and forces, and the high valour of their English allies and the chosen forces of the Ottoman Empire. The noble confidence of the generals is to pass into the souls of the soldiers.' At the same time, as we read in the English correspondent's letter, Lord Raglan issues his memorandum, requesting Mr. Commissary-General Filder 'to take steps to insure that the troops shall all be provided with a ration of porter for the next few days.'

There is the record of it all in the old newspapers. Private Vance's letters are not given, for Dolly kept them for her own reading when they came at last. By the same mail came news from the two last departing travellers. Marker, who had brought in the letters one evening, waited in the doorway.

'George!' cried Dolly, tearing her first envelope open, and then half-laughing, half-crying, she read her letter out.

George seemed in good spirits. He wrote from Varna. A previous packet must have been lost, for he said he had written before. This was a cheerful and affectionate letter, quite matter-of-fact, and with no complaints or railings at fate.

'I daresay people think me a great fool,' he said, 'but, on the whole, I don't regret what I have done, except for any annoyance it may have caused you. If you and mamma would go to the Horse Guards and ask for a commission for me, perhaps two such pretty ladies might mollify the authorities. They say commissions are not difficult to get just now. I shall consult the colonel about it; I am to see him again in a day or two. I don't know why I did not speak to him just now when he sent for me.' Then he went on to say that his Bulbul scholarship had stood him in good service, and his little Turkish had been turned to account. He had already passed as second-class interpreter, and he

had got hold of some books and was getting on. 'This is the reason why the Colonel sent for me yesterday morning. I am Private Vance, remember, only just out of the awkward squad. Our Colonel is a grand old man, with bright eagle eyes, and the heroic manner. He is like one of your favourite heroes. Do you remember Aunt Sarah's talking of David Fane, our father's old friend? When I found out who he was I felt very much inclined to tell him my real name. He said to me at once, "I see you are not exactly what you appear to be. If you will come to me in a day or two I shall be glad to talk to you about your prospects; in the meanwhile don't forget what a good influence one man of good education and feeling can exert in the ranks of a regiment." Old Fane himself is no bad specimen of a true knight; we all feel the better for knowing him. He walks with a long swift stride like a deer, tossing his head as he goes. I have never seen him in battle, but I can imagine him leading his men to victory, and I am glad of the chance which has given me such a leader. I wish there were more like him. Tell Raban, if you see him, that I am getting on very well, and that, far from being a black sheep here, no lambskin can compare with my pipe-clay.' Then came something erased. 'Dearest Dolly, you don't know what your goodness has been to me all this time. I hope Robert appreciates his good luck. This will reach you about the time of your wedding-day. I will send you a little Russian belt when I can find an opportunity. My love to them all, and be kind to Rhoda, for the sake of your most affectionate

'G. V.'

There was a P.S.

'I forgot to ask you when I last wrote whether you got the letter I wrote you at Cambridge, and if old Miller gave you my packet. I bought the form in the town as I walked down to the boats; it all seems a horrid dream as I think

of it now, and I am very much ashamed of that whole business; and yet I should like to leave matters as they are, dear, and to feel that I have done my best for that poor little girl. My love to old John; tell him to write. There has been a good deal of sickness here, but the worst is over.'

The paper trembled in Dolly's hand as she dwelt upon every crooked line and twist of the dear handwriting that wrote 'George is safe.'

'I told you all along it was absurd to make such a disturbance about him. You see he was enjoying himself with his common associates,' said Mrs. Palmer crossly. 'Strangely peculiar,' she added after a moment. 'Dolly, did it ever occur to you that the dear boy was a little ——?' and she tapped her fair forehead significantly.

'He was only unhappy, mamma, but you see he is getting better now,' said Dolly.

The next time Dolly saw Rhoda she ran up and kissed her, looking so kind that Rhoda was quite surprised and wondered what had happened to make Dolly so nice again.

CHAPTER XLII.

RACHEL.

Shepherd, what's love, I pray thee tell?
It is that fountain and that well
Where pleasure and repentance dwell;
It is perhaps that sauncing bell
That tolls all into heaven or hell.
And this is love as I heard tell.

It was not only in the hospitals at Varna that people were anxious and at work at the time when George wrote. While the English ships were embarking their stores and their companies, their horses and their battalions, transporting them through surf and through storm to the shores of the fierce Russian Empire; while Eastern hospitals were organising their wards, nurses preparing to start on their errand; while generals were sitting in council,—an enemy had attacked us at home in the very heart of our own great citadel and store place, and the peaceful warriors sent to combat this deadly foe are fighting their own battles. Cholera was the name of the enemy, and among those who had been expecting the onslaught, haranguing, driving companies of somewhat reluctant officials, good old John Morgan had been one of the most prominent. His own district at Kensington was well armed and prepared, but John Morgan's life at Kensington was coming to an end, and he had accepted a certain small living in the city called St. Mary Outh'gate, of which the rector was leaving after five or six years' hard work. 'It is a case of bricks without

straw,' said the poor worn-out rector. Morgan was full of courage and ready to try his hand. Mrs. Morgan, with a sigh given to the old brown house and its comfortable cupboards, had agreed to move goods and chattels shortly into the dark little rectory in the City court, with its iron gates and its one smutty tree. To the curate's widow and mother there was an irresistible charm in the thought of a rectory.

St. Mary Outh'gate was a feeble saint, and unable to protect her votaries from the evil effects of some open sewers and fish-heaps when the cholera broke out—at John's request the move was delayed. The girls remained at Kensington, while Mrs. Morgan travelled backwards and forwards between the homes. Every day the accounts grew more and more serious, and in the month of September the mortality had reached its height.

John's new parish of St. Mary Outh'gate lies on the river side of a great thoroughfare, of which the stream of carts and wheels rolls by from sunrise until the stars set. The rectory-house stood within its iron gates, in a court at the end of a narrow passage. The back of the house looked into a cross lane leading to the river. The thoroughfare itself was squalid, crowded, bare; there was nothing picturesque about it; but in the side streets were great warehouse cranes starting from high windows, and here and there some relic of past glories. Busy to-day had forgotten some old doorway perhaps, or left some garden or terrace-wall, or some old banqueting-room still standing. It had swept the guests into the neighbouring churchyards on its rapid way. To-day was in a fierce and reckless mood: at home and abroad were anxious people watching the times, others were too busy to be anxious. John was hard at work and untiring. He had scarcely had time to unpack his portmanteau and to put up his beloved books and reports. His start had been a dispiriting one. People had been dying by scores in the little lane

at the back of the rectory. Mrs. Morgan herself fell ill of anxiety and worry, and had to go home. It must be confessed that the cares of the move and the capabilities of the drawing-room carpet added not a little to the poor lady's distress. Betty remained to take care of her master, and to give him her mind. John bore the old woman's scolding with great sweetness of temper. 'You do your work, Betty, and let me do mine,' said he. He had taken in two professional nurses after his mother left, and his curate, whose landlady had died of the prevailing epidemic. The two men worked with good will. John came, went, preached, fumed, wrote letters to *The Times*. Frank, who was in town, came to see him one day. He found the curate in good spirits. Things were beginning to look a little less dark, and John was one of those who made the best of chance lights. He received his friend heartily, wheeled his one arm-chair up for him, and lit a pipe in his honour. The two sat talking in the old bare black room leading into the court. John gave a short account of his month's work.

'It's over now—at least, the worst is over,' he said, 'and the artisans are at work again. It's the poor little shopkeepers I pity, they have lost everything—health, savings, customers—they are quite done up. However, I have a friend in the neighbourhood to whom I go, and Lady Sarah heard of my letter to *The Times* and sent me fifty pounds for them the other day. Dolly brought it herself. I was sorry to see her looking worn, poor dear. I think it is a pity that Mrs. Palmer takes so very desponding a view of her daughter's prospects. Dolly seemed disinclined to speak on the subject, so I did not press her, and we all know,' said the curate, in a constrained sort of voice, 'that Henley is a high-minded man, his good judgment, and sense of . . . .'

'His own merit,' said Raban, testily. 'What a thing it is to have a sense of one's own virtue. He will get on in

India, he will get on in every quarter of the world, he will go to heaven and be made an archangel. He has won a prize already that he does not know how to value at its worth, and never will as long as he lives.'

John Morgan looked very much disturbed. 'I am very sorry to hear you say this. Tell me as a friend, when Mrs. Palmer declares the engagement is broken off, do you really think there is any fear of . . . .'

Frank jumped up suddenly.

'Broken off!' he cried, trying to hide his face of supreme satisfaction, and he began walking up and down the room. 'Does she say so?'

The dismal little room seemed suddenly illumined; the smoky court, the smutty-tree, the brown opposite foggy houses were radiant. Frank could not speak. His one thought was to see Dolly, to find out the truth; he hardly heard the rest of the curate's sentence. 'I have been so busy,' he was saying, 'that I have scarcely had one minute to think about it all; but I love Dolly dearly, she is a noble creature, and I should heartily grieve to hear that anything had occurred to trouble her. Are you going already?'

There is a little well of fresh water in Kensington Gardens, sparkling among the trees, and dripping into a stone basin. A few stone steps lead down to the lion's head, from whence the slender stream drips drop by drop into the basin; the children and the birds, too, come and drink there. Somewhere near this well a fairy Prince was once supposed to hold his court. The glade is lovely in summer, and pleasant in autumn, especially late in the day, when the shadows are growing long, and the stems of the murmurous elm-trees shine with western gold.

Frank Raban was crossing from the high-road towards the Palace gate, and he was walking with a long shadow of

his own, when he chanced to see a nymph standing by the railing and waiting while the stream trickled into the cup below. As he passed she looked up, their eyes met, and Frank stopped short, for the nymph was that one of which he had been thinking as he came along—Dorothea of the pale face and waving bronze hair.

As he stopped Eliza came up the steps of the well, bringing her young mistress the glass; it was still very wet with the spray of the water, and Dolly, smiling, held it out to Raban, who took it with a bow from her hand. It was more than he had ever hoped, to meet her thus alone at the moment when he wanted to see her, to be greeted so kindly, so silently. No frowning Robert was in the background, only Eliza waiting with her rosy face, while Dolly stood placid in the sloping light, in the sunset, and the autumn. Her broad feathered hat was pushed back, her eyes were alight.

'I am so glad to see you,' she said. 'You have heard our good news from George? it came two nights ago. My aunt has been asking for you, Mr. Raban. What have you been doing all this time?'

'I have been at Cambridge,' said Frank. 'I am only up in town for two days; I was afraid of being in your way. Is everybody gone? Are you alone? How is Lady Sarah?'

'She is better, I think. I am going back to her now,' said Dolly. 'I came here with Eliza to get her some of this chalybeate water. Will you come with me part of the way home?'

Of course he would come. He was engaged to dine at the club, and his hosts never forgave him for failing; he had letters to answer and they remained on the table. He had left John Morgan in a hurry, too much excited by the news he had heard to smoke out his pipe in tranquillity, but here was peace under the chestnut-trees where the two shadows

were falling side by side and lengthening as the world heaved towards the night.

As they were walking along Frank began telling Dolly about a second letter he had received from his grandfather; he could never resist the wish to tell her all about himself; even if she did not care to hear, he liked to tell her.

'I am in an uncertain state of mind,' he said. 'Since I saw you my grandfather has taken me into favour again: after these seven years he offers me Leah. He wants me to give up driving young gentlemen and to take to sheep-shearing and farming and a good allowance. He writes to me from Harrogate. I should have a house and serve in bondage, and live upon him, and rescue him from the hands of the agents who now perform that office very effectually,' said Raban, dryly.

'What do you mean?' said Dolly, looking at him doubtfully.

'This is what I mean,' said Frank; 'I cannot forget how badly the old people used me, and how for seven years they have left me to shift for myself. I have always failed in ambition. I shall never win Rachel,' he said, 'and I want nothing else that anybody can give me; and what is the use of putting my head under the tyrannic old yoke?'

'It is so difficult to be just,' Dolly answered, leading the way under the trees. 'When I try to think of right and wrong it all seems to turn into people and what they wish and what I would like to do for them. I wonder if some people can love by rule? And yet love must be the best rule, mustn't it? and if your poor old grandfather is sorry and begs you to go to him, it seems cruel to refuse.'

She seemed to be speaking in tune to some solemn strain of music which was floating in the air.

Frank was looking at the ground, and without raising

his eyes he presently said,—'Well, I suppose you are right; I shall take your advice and give up the dry crust of liberty and try to be content with cakes and ale; such strong ale, Miss Vanborough, such heavy cakes,' he added, looking at her absently.

Dolly blushed up, hesitated: she was rather frightened by the responsibility Frank seemed to put upon her.

'Could not you ask some one else?' she said, confusedly. 'Perhaps Rachel,' she added, not without a little jealous pang, lest Rachel might be Rhoda, and her poor boy's last chance undone.

The light seemed to come from Raban's dark eyes. 'I *have* asked Rachel,' he said, in a low voice that seemed to thrill clear and distinct on her ears. 'Is it possible? do you not know it? Is not your name Rachel to me? are you not the only Rachel in the whole world for me? I never thought I should tell you this,' cried Frank, 'until just now, when I heard from John Morgan that you were free; but now, whatever your answer may be, I tell you, that you may know that you are the one only woman whom I shall ever love. My dear, don't look frightened, don't turn away. Robert Henley never loved you as I do.'

His coldness was gone; his half sarcastic, half sulky, careless manner was gone. It had given way to a sort of tender domination; the real generous fire of truth and unselfish love, that belonged to the man and had always been in him, seemed to flash out. The music still clanged on, solemnly jarring with his words. Dolly turned pale and cold.

'I am not free; it has all been a mistake,' she said, very quickly. 'You must not speak to me of Robert like that.'

His face changed. 'Are you still engaged to him?' he asked, looking at her steadily.

'I promised to wait for him, and you have no right to

ask me anything at all,' she cried, turning upon him. 'Oh, why did you—how can you speak to me so?' She spoke vehemently, passionately.

He was silent; but she had answered his eyes, not his spoken words. He saw that her eyes were full of tears. He had read her too carefully to have had much hope. He saw that she was overpowered, that she was bound to Robert still, that his wild dream of happiness was but a vision. It was no new revelation to him. 'You might have guessed it all long ago,' said he, shortly. 'But you would not understand me before, when I tried to tell you that I loved you. Now you know all,' he said, with a sigh. 'Forget it if you like.'

He would have left her, but Eliza had disappeared, and a crowd of people were gathered outside the gate, rough-looking Irish among them from the buildings opposite. A military funeral was passing by, the music had ceased, and the soldiers went tramping down the street in a long and solemn line; the slow fall of their feet struck upon the hard road and echoed with a dull throb. People were looking on in silence and crowding to the windows and in the doorways. As the dead man's horse was led by with the empty saddle and the boots swinging from the side, Dolly turned away pale and trembling, and Raban was glad then he had not left her. She put out her hand for a moment. She seemed blinded and scared.

Then she recovered herself quickly, and when the crowd gave way, she walked on in silence by his side until they came to the turning that led to the old house. 'Thank you,' she said, a little tremulously. 'Forgive me if I spoke harshly; it was best to tell you the truth.'

Raban had meant to leave her without a word: now he suddenly changed his mind. He held out his hand.

'Good-by, Rachel,' he said, still looking at her with

silent reproach. 'Do not fear that I shall trouble and annoy you again; it would be hard to take your friendship and confidence away from me because of John Morgan's mistake.'

'How can you be my friend?' cried poor Dolly suddenly, passionate and angry once more. 'Leave me now—only go, please go.'

Henley would have been satisfied if he had been present.

Frank walked away, bitterly hurt and wounded; she seemed to resent his love as if it had been an insult. He was disappointed in Dolly, in life; the light was gone out, that one flash of happiness had shown him his own disappointment all the more plainly. We don't hope, and yet our hearts sink with disappointment: we expect nothing, but that nothing overwhelms us. And meanwhile life is going on, and death, and the many interests and changes of mortals coming and going on their journey through space. When Frank got back to Cambridge he found a telegram summoning him at once to Harrogate. It was sent by some unknown person.

People part—each carries away so much of the other's life; very often the exchange is a hard-driven bargain, willingly paid indeed, which the poor debtor is in no inclination to resent:—a whole heart's fidelity and remembrance in sleepless nights, tendered prayers and blessings, and exchange for a little good grammar, a pleasant recollection, and some sand and ink and paper, all of which Dolly duly received that evening. All day long she had been haunted by that little scene at the well; it seemed to bring her nearer to Henley, and his letter came as an answer to her thoughts. George's letter had been for them all. Robert's was for herself alone, and she took it up to her room to read.

Robert's letter was not very short: it was sufficiently stamped: it said all that had to be said; and yet, 'How unreasonable I am! how can men feel as women do?' thought Dolly, kissing the letter to make up for her passing

disappointment. Then came a thought, but she put it away with a sort of anger and indignation. She would not let herself think of Frank with pity or sympathy. It seemed disloyal to Robert to be sorry for the poor tutor.

Lady Henley also received a blotted scrawl from Jonah by that same post, and she made up her mind at last to go home, and she sent the brougham for Dolly and her mother to come and wish her good-by. On her first arrival Dolly was pounced upon by her cousins and taken in to Sir Thomas. When she came upstairs at last, she found her aunt and her mother in full committee, apparently on good terms, and with their heads close together. The little lady was upon the sofa. Mrs. Palmer was upon the floor, in a favourite attitude. There only could she find complete rest, she said. Lady Henley had a great heap of Jonah's clothes upon the sofa beside her; she had been folding them up and marking them with her own hands. The drawing-room seemed full of the sound of the bells from the towers outside, and autumn leaves were dropping before the windows.

'Come here,' said Lady Henley, holding out her hand to Dolly. 'I have been talking to your mother about you. Look at her—as if there were no chairs in the room! I wanted to show you Jonah's letter. Foolish boy, he sends you his love! I don't know why I should give the message. You know you don't care for him, Dolly. Have you heard from Robert? Is he properly heart-broken?' with a sort of hoarse laugh. 'Jonah mentions that he seems in very good spirits.' Then Lady Henley became agitated. Dolly stood silent and embarrassed. 'Why don't you answer,' said her aunt, quite fiercely. 'You can't answer; you can't show us his letter; you know in your heart that it has been a foolish affair. Your mother has told me all.'

Lady Henley was flushed and getting more and more excited, and, at the same time, Philippa gave one of her

silvery laughs, and starting actively to her feet, came and put her arm round Dolly's waist.

'All! no, indeed, Joanna. Delightful creature as he is, Robert tells one nothing. Forgive me, dearest, it is a fact. He really seemed quite to forget what was due to me, a lady in her own drawing-room, when he said good-by to you. I only mention it, for he is not generally so *empressé*, and if he had only explained himself ——'

'What have you been saying, mamma?' said Dolly, blushing painfully. 'There is nothing to explain.'

'There is everything to explain,' burst in Lady Henley from her corner; 'and if you were my own daughter, Dolly, I should think it my duty to remonstrate with you, and to tell you frankly what I have always said from the beginning. There never was the slightest chance of happiness in this entanglement for either of you; take the advice of an older woman than yourself. Robert has no more feeling for you than—than—a fish, or do you think he would consent to be free? Ah! if you were not so blinded. . . There is one honest heart,' she said, incoherently, breaking down for an instant. She quickly recovered, however, and Dolly, greatly distressed, stood looking at her, but she could not respond; if ever she had swerved, her faithful heart had now fully returned to its first allegiance. All they said seemed only to make her feel more and more how entirely her mind was made up.

'Robert and I understand each other quite well,' said Dolly, gravely. 'I wish him to be free. It is my doing, not his; please don't speak of this to me, or to any one else again.'

She had promised to herself to be faithful, whatever came. Her whole heart had gone after Robert as he left her. She knew that she loved him. With all her humility, the thought that she had made a mistake in him had been painful beyond measure. It seemed to her now that she was

answerable for his faith, for his loyalty, and she eagerly grasped at every shadow of that which she hoped to find in him.

She walked away to the window to hide her own gathering tears. The bells had come to an end suddenly. Some children were playing in the middle of the road and pursuing one another, and a stray organ-man, seeing a lady at the window, pulled out his stop and struck up a dreary tune —'Partant pour la Syrie, le jeune et beau Dunois.' It was the tune of those times, but Dolly could never hear it afterwards without a sickening dislike. Dolly, hearing the door bang, turned round at last.

'My dear Dolly, she is gone—she is in a passion—she will never forgive you,' said Philippa, coming up in great excitement.

But she was mistaken. Lady Henley sent Dolly a little note that very evening:—

My Dear,—I was very angry with you to-day. Perhaps I was wrong to be angry. I will not say forgive an old woman for speaking the truth; it is only what you deserve. You must come and see us when you can in Yorkshire. We all feel you belong to us now.

Yours affectionately,

Joanna Henley.

P.S.—I see in this evening's paper that our poor old neighbours at Ravensrick died at Harrogate within a day of one another. I suppose your friend Frank Raban comes into the property.

CHAPTER XLIII.

CRAGS AND FRESH AIR.

My prayers with this I used to charge:
A piece of land not very large,
Wherein there should a garden be;
A clear spring flowing ceaselessly;
And where, to crown the whole, there should
A patch be found of growing wood.
All this and more the gods have sent.

—HORACE: T. MARTIN.

THE old town of Pebblesthwaite, in Yorkshire, slides down the side of a hill into the hollow. Rocks overtop the town-hall, and birds flying from the crags can look straight down into the greystone streets, and upon the flat roofs of the squat houses. Pebblesthwaite lies in the heart of Craven,—a country little known, and not yet within the tramp of the feet of the legions. It is a district of fresh winds and rocky summits, of thymy hill-sides, and of a quaint and arid sweetness. The rocks, the birds, the fresh rush of the mountain streams as they dash over the stones, strike Southerners most curiously. We contrast this pleasant turmoil with the sleepy lap of our weed-laden waters, the dull tranquillity of our fertile plains. If we did not know that we are but a day's journey from our homes, we might well wonder and ask ourselves in what unknown country we are wandering. Strange-shaped hills heave suddenly from the plains; others, rising and flowing tumultuously, line the horizon: overhead great clouds are advancing, heaped in massive lines against a

blue and solid sky. These clouds rise with the gusts of a sudden wind that blows into Frank Raban's face as he comes jogging through the old town on his way to the house, from which he had been expelled seven years before, and to which he was now returning as master. Smokethwaite is the metropolis of Pebblesthwaite, near which is Ravensrick. The station is on a little branch line of rail, starting off from the main line towards these rocks and crags of Craven.

Frank had come down with the Henleys, and seen them all driving off in the carriages and carts that had come down to meet them from the Court. Nothing had come for him, and he had walked to the inn and ordered the trap.

'Where art goin'?' shouts a pair of leather-gaiters standing firm upon the doorstep of an old arched house opposite.

'Ravensrick Court,' says the driver.

''Tis a blustering day,' says old leather-gaiters.

The driver cracks his whip, and begins to do the honours of Pebblesthwaite as the horse clatters over the stones. 'Do ye ken t' shambles?' he says, pointing to an old arched building overtopped by a great crag.

'I know it as well as you do,' says Frank, smiling.

Can it be seven years since he left? Raban looks about: every stone and every pane of glass seems familiar. The town was all busy and awake. The farmers, sturdy, crop-headed, with baskets on their arms, were chattering and selling, standing in groups, or coming in and out of shops and doorways, careful as any housewives over their purchases. There were strange stores—shoes, old iron, fish, all heaped together; seven years older than when the last market-day Frank was there, but none the worse for that. There was the old auctioneer, in his tall, battered hat, disposing of his treasures. He was holding up a horse's yoke to competition. 'Three shillin'! four shillin'!' says he. The

people crowd and gape round. One fellow, in a crimson waistcoat, driving past in a donkey-cart, stops short and stares hard at the trap and at Raban. Frank knew him, and nodded with a smile. Two more stumpy leather-gaiters, greeting each other, looked up as he drove by, and grinned. He remembered them too. There was the old Quaker, in his white neckcloth, standing at the door of his handsome old shop; and Squire Anley, walking along to the bank, all dressed from head to foot in loose grey clothes, with his bull-terrier at his heels. And then they drove out into the straight country roads, under the bridge between stone hedges, beyond which the late flames of summer green were still gleaming,—the meadows still shone with spangling autumn flowers. Far away in the hollow hung the smoke of the factory, with its many windows; a couple of tall chimneys spouted blackness; a train was speeding northward; close at hand a stream was dashing; the great trees seemed full of birds. It was a different world from that in which he had been basking. Frank already felt years younger as he drove along the road,—the old boyish impulses seemed waiting at every turn. 'Why, there goes old Brand,' he cried, leaning forward eagerly to look after an old keeper, with a couple of dogs, walking off with a gun towards the hills.

Frank called after the keeper, but the wind carried away his voice. As he drove along by each stile and corner that seemed to have awaited his coming, he suddenly thought of his talk with Dorothea. She had been cruelly hard to him, but he was glad to think now that he had followed her advice about forgiveness of injuries, and made an advance to the poor old people who were now gone. It would have been absurd to pretend to any great sorrow for their death. They had lived their life and shown him little kindness while it lasted. It was a chance now that brought him back to Ravensrick again.

He had written an answer to his grandfather's letter and accepted his offer, but the only answer which ever came to this was the telegram summoning him to Harrogate. It had been delayed on the way; and as he went down in the train, the first thing he saw was a paragraph in *The Times*,—'At the Mitre Hotel, Harrogate, on the 28th instant, John Raban, Esq., of Ravensrick, Pebblesthwaite, aged 86; and on the following day, Antonia, widow of the above John Raban, Esq., aged 75.' The old squire had gone to Harrogate for the benefit of his health, but he had died quite suddenly; and the poor lady to whom he had left everything, notwithstanding his injunctions and elaborate directions as to her future disposal of it, sank the night after his death, unable to struggle through the dark hours.

And then came confusion, undertakers, lawyers, and agents, in the midst of which some one thought of sending for Frank. He was the old couple's one grandson, and the old lady had left no will. So the tutor came in for the savings of their long lives—the comfortable old house, the money in the bank, the money in the funds, the ox and the ass, and the man-servant and the maid-servant, who had had their own way for so many years past, and preyed upon the old couple with much fidelity. They all attended the funeral in new suits of mourning ordered by the agent. Frank recognised many of them. There was the old housekeeper who used to box his ears as a little boy; the butler who used to complain of him. He was oppressed by all these yards of black cloth and these dozens of white pocket-handkerchiefs; and he let them return alone to Ravensrick, and followed in the course of a day or two.

There are harsh words and unkind judgments in life, but what a might of nature, of oblivion and distraction is arrayed in battle against them; daylight, lamplight, sounds of birds and animals come in between, and turn the slander,

the ill-spoken sentence and its fierce retort from its path. What do harsh words matter that were spoken a week ago? Seven days' sunshine have brightened since then. While I am railing at false friends and harsh interpretations, the clematis' flowers have starred the wavering curtain of green that shades my window from the light; the old Norman steeple has clanged the blue hours, the distant flow of the sea has reached me, with a sound of the twitter of birds in accompaniment. Is it six months ago since A. judged B. unkindly? A. and B., walking by the opal light of the distant horizon, are thinking no more of coldness and unkindness, but of the fresh sweetness of the autumnal sea.

As Frank comes driving along the well-known road, and the fresh blustering winds blow into his face, past unkindness matters little, every gust sends it farther away. He thinks, with a vague sense of pity, of a poor little ghost that used to run hiding and shrinking away in dark corners, a little fatalist doomed to break windows, slam doors, and leave gates ajar, through which accusing geese, sheep, ponies would straggle to convict him. He used to think they were all in one league against him. Twice a week on an average he was led up into his grandfather's study to be cross-examined and to criminate himself hopelessly before that inexorable old judge:—a handsome old man with flowing white locks and a grand manner and opinion upon every subject. If old Mrs. Raban generally supplied the opinions, the language was the Squire's own. Mrs. Raban had been a spoiled old beauty, rouged and frizzed and rustling; she disliked every one who interfered with her own importance. She adored her husband, and was jealous of him to the last. Some chance speech had set her against the poor little 'heir' as some one called him, and she had decreed that he was a naughty and stupid little boy and was

to be kept in his place. There rises Frank's little doppelgänger before him, hanging his head, convicted of having broken the carriage-window, or some such offence; there sits the old judge in his arm-chair by the library-table, dignified, stately, uttering magnificent platitudes, to which the ancestor in the cauliflower wig is listening with deep attention. Frank seems to hear the echo of his voice and the rustle of his grandmother's dress as she leaves the room: but the horse starts, a partridge scuffles across the road, and he comes back to the present again.

'Yan goes,' says the driver, excitedly, standing up on his box. Then they pass a little tumbledown village, and there at a turn of the road rise the chimneys of Ravensrick, and Pen-y-ghent rearing its huge back behind them, and the iron gates, and the old avenue, and the crows flying, whirling, dancing, sliding in twos and threes and twenties—how often the little doppelgänger had watched their mystic dance. Had it been going on for seven years?

'There's t' Court,' said Frank's companion—a good-humoured, talkative man. 'T' owd Squire, he were respectit, but he let things go.' As he spoke they were passing by a cottage with a broken roof and a generally dilapidated, half-patched look; a ragged woman was standing at the door, two wild-looking children were rolling in the dust; at the same time a man on horseback, coming the contrary way, rode past them on the road. The driver touched his cap, the woman disappeared into the house.

'That's Thomas Close, t' agent,' said Frank's companion.

Frank, looking back as the carriage turned, saw a curious little scene. One of the children, who was standing in the road, suddenly stamped and clenched his little fist at the agent as he passed. The man reined in his horse, leant back, and cut at the child with his whip; the little boy, howling, ran into the cottage.

Frank asked the driver what he knew of the people in the cottage.

The man shrugged his shoulders. 'Mary Styles she is queer in her ways,' said he: 'i' t' habit o' snuffin' and drinkin'. Joe Styles he follows t' Squire's cart; t' agent give him notice la-ast Monday—he wer' down at our ya-ard wantin' work, poor chap,' said the man, with a crack of the whip. 'Thomas Close he says he will have nought nor bachelors upon t' farm. He's a ——'

'Stop,' said Frank: 'I'll get down here: take my portmanteau to the front door and tell them to pay you, and say that—a—I am coming.'

The man stared, and suddenly gave a low whistle as he drove off. Meanwhile the new Squire walked up by the back way. He crossed the kitchen-garden and got on to the terrace. How well he knew the way; the lock of the gate was easier than it used to be—the walls were greener and thicker with leaves and trellis. The old couple were coming back no more, but the beds they had planted were bright with Michaelmas daisies and lilies, and crimson and golden berries with purple leaves were heaping the terrace, where a man was at work snipping at the overgrowth of the box hedges. There was the iron scrolled gate through which you could see the distant view of Pen-y-ghent. There was the old summer-house, where he once kept a ménagerie of snails, until they were discovered by Miss Meal, his grandmother's companion. Coming out of the garden he found himself face to face with the long rows of doors and of windows—those deadly enemies of his youth; a big brown dog, like a fox, with a soft skin and a friendly nose, came trotting up with a friendly expression. It followed Frank along the back passage leading straight into the hall: it was one of those huge stone halls such as people in Yorkshire like. The man in armour stood keeping watch

in his corner—the lantern swung, every chair was in its place, and the old man's hat and his dogskin gloves lay ready for him on the oak table.

Then Frank opened the dining-room door. It faced westward, and the light came sliding upon the floors and walls and shining old mirrors, just as he remembered it. There was the doctor of divinity in his gown and band, who used to make faces at him as he sat at luncheon; there was the King Charles's beauty, leaning her cheek upon her hand, and pensively contemplating the door and watching her descendants pass through. This one walks firm and quick; he does not come shuffling and with care; though give him but time enough, and it may come to that. But, meanwhile, the ancestry on canvas, the old chairs with their fat seats and slim bandy legs, the old spoons curling into Queen Anne scrolls, the books in the bookcases—all have passed out of the grasping old hands, and Frank, who had been denied twenty pounds often when he was in need, might help himself now, there was no one to oppose his right.

The next room is the library, and his heart beats a little as he opens the door. There is no one sitting there. The place is empty and in order; the chair is put against the wall; the oracle is silent; there is nothing to be afraid of any more.

Frank, as he stands in the torture chamber, makes a vow to remember his own youth, if, as time goes on, he should ever be tempted to be hard upon others. Then he walks across to the fireplace and rings the bell. It jangles long and loud; it startles all the respectable old servants, who are drinking hot beer, in their handsome mourning, in the housekeeper's room. Frank has to ring again before anybody finds courage to come.

Perrin, the butler, refusing to move, two of the housemaids appear at last, hand in hand. They peep in at the

door, and give a little shriek when they see the window open and Frank standing there. They are somewhat reassured when a very civil young master, with some odd resemblance to the old eagle-faced Squire, requests them to light a fire and show him to a room.

'I came in the back way,' he said. 'I am Mr. Raban.'

Frank declines the Squire's room, the great four-post bedstead, and the mahogany splendour, and chooses a more modest apartment on the stairs, with a pretty view of the valley.

He came down to a somewhat terrible and solitary meal in the great dining-room; more than once he looked up at his ancestor, now too well-mannered to make faces at the heir. All that evening Frank was busy with Mr. Close. He said so little, and seemed so indifferent, that the agent began to think that another golden age was come, and that, with a little tact and patience, he might be able to rule the new Squire as completely as he had ruled the old one. Close was a vulgar, ambitious man, of a lower class than is usual in his profession. He had begun life as a house-agent. Most of the Squire's property consisted in houses; he had owned a whole street in Smokethwaite, as well as a couple of mills let out to tenants.

'I daresay you won't care to be troubled with all these details,' said the agent, taking up his books as he said good-night.

'You may as well leave them,' said Frank, sleepily. 'They will be quite safe if you leave them there, Mr. Close. I will just look them over once more.'

And Mr. Close rather reluctantly put them down, and set out on his homeward walk.

It was very late. Frank threw open the window when he was alone, and stood on the step looking into the cool blackness; hazy and peaceful, he could just distinguish the cows in the fields, just hear the rush of the torrent at the

bridge down below. He could see the dewy, veiled flash of the lights overhead. From all this he turned away to Mr. Close's books again. Until late into the night he sat adding and calculating and comparing figures. He had taken a prejudice against the agent, but he wanted to be sure of the facts before he questioned him about their bearing. It was Frank's habit to be slow, and to take his time. About one o'clock, as he was thinking of going to bed, something came scratching at the window, which opened down to the ground. It was the brown dog Pixie, who came in, and springing up into the Squire's empty chair, went fast asleep. When Frank got up to go to bed, Pixie jumped down, shook himself, and trotted upstairs at his heels.

Frank took a walk early next morning. What he saw did not give him much satisfaction. He first went to the little farm near the bridge. He remembered it trim and well kept. Many a time he had come to the kitchen door and poured out his troubles to kind Mrs. Tanner, the farmer's wife. But the farmer's wife was dead, and the farm had lost its trim, bright look. The flowers were in the garden, the torrent foamed, but the place looked forlorn; there was a bad smell from a drain; there was a gap in the paling, a general come-down-in-the-world look about the stables; and yet it was a pretty place, even in its present neglect. A stableman was clanking about the yard, where some sheep were penned. A girl with gipsy eyes and a faded yellow dress stood at the kitchen-door. She made way for Frank to pass. Tanner himself, looking shrunken, oldened, and worn out, was smoking his pipe by the hearth. He had been out in the fields, and was come in to rest among his old tankards and blackened pipes.

Frank was disappointed by the old man's dull recognition. He stared at him and tapped his pipe.

'Ay, sir,' he said, 'I know you, why not? Joe Sturt

from t' "Ploo" told me you hed com'. Foalks com's and go's. T' owd Squire he's gone his way. He's com' oop again a young squire. T' owd farmer maybe will foller next. T' young farmer is a wa-aiting to step into his clogs.'

Old Tanner turned a surly back upon Frank.

'Well, good-by,' said the young landlord at last. 'If Mrs. Tanner had been alive she would have been more friendly than you have been.'

This plain-speaking seemed to suit the old farmer, who turned stiffly and looked over his shoulder.

'She wer' kind to all,' said he; 'even to gra-aspin' landlords that bring ruin on the farmer, and think nought o' doublin' t' rent. I wo-ant leave t' owd pla-ace,' said Tanner. 'Ye ca-ant turn me out. I know ye would like to thraw it into t' pa-ark, but I'll pay t' la-ast farthin'. Close he wer' here again a-spyin', and he tould me ye had given him the lease. D—— him.'

'Don't swear, Tanner,' said Frank, laughing. 'Who wants your farm? what is it all about?' And then it all came out. 'There is some mistake; I will speak to Close,' Frank said, walking off abruptly to hide his annoyance.

'T' cold-blooded fella,' said old Tanner, settling down to his pipe again; but somehow it had a better flavour than before.

Close had not been prepared for Frank's early walk, and the new lease he was bringing for the new landlord to sign was already on its way to the Court. The old Squire had refused to turn Tanner out, but the lease was up, and year by year the agent had added to the rent. It was a pretty little place, capable of being made into a comfortable dwelling-house, where Mr. Close felt he could end his days in peace. Old Tanner was past his work, it was absurd of him to cling on. There had been a battle between the two, and poor old Tanner had been going to the wall.

Presently Frank forgot his indignation, for he met an old friend down the steep lane that led to the moor.

James Brand was a picturesque figure, advancing between the hedges this bright September morning. He had heavy gaiters, a gun was slung across his shoulders, and a lurcher was leaping at his heels. The old fellow was straight and active, with two blue eyes like pools, and a face as seamed and furrowed as the rocks among which he lived.

'Thought ye wer' ne'er coomin', Mr. Frank,' said he, quietly; 't' wife she sent me to look,' and he held out a horny hand.

He was very quiet: he turned silently and led the way back to the little stone house built against the slope of the hill. The two trudged together: the keeper went a little ahead. Every now and then he looked over his shoulder with a glance of some satisfaction. Frank followed, stooping under the low doorway that led into the old familiar stone kitchen, with the long strings of oat-cake hanging to dry, its oak cupboard and deep window-sills, the great chimney, where Mrs. Brand was busied. Frank remembered everything: the guns slung on the walls, the framed almanack, the stuffed wild-fowl, the gleam of the mountain lake through the deep window, the face of his old nurse as she came to meet him. People who have been through trouble, and who have been absorbed in their own interests, sometimes feel ashamed when time goes on and they come back to some old home and discover what faithful remembrance has followed them all along, and love, to which, perhaps, they never gave a thought. If old things have a charm, old love and old friendship are like old wine with a special gentle savour of their own.

Frank had always remembered the Brands with kindness: once or twice at Christmas he had sent his old nurse a little remembrance, but that was all; he had never done anything

to deserve such affection as that which he read written upon her worn face. Her eyes were full of tears as she welcomed him. She said very little, but she took his hand and looked at him silently, and then almost immediately began to busy herself, bringing out oat-cake and wine from an oak chest that stood in the window.

'There is the old oak chest,' said Frank, looking about; 'why, nothing is changed, James!'

'We do-ant change,' said James, looking about, with a silent sort of chuckle. Neither he, nor the old dame, nor the stout-built stone lodge were made to change. It was piled up with heavy stones; winter storms could not shake it, nor summer heats penetrate the stout walls.

This part of Craven country flows in strange and abrupt waves to the east and to the west. Rocks heap among the heather, winds come blowing across the moors, that lie grey and purple at mid-day, and stern and sweet in the evening and morning; rivers flow along their rocky beds, hawks fly past, eagles sometimes swoop down into this quaint world of stones and flowers.

Frank, standing at the door of the keeper's lodge, could look across to the court and to the hills beyond where the woods were waving; some natural feeling of exultation he may have felt, thinking that all this had come to him when he least expected it; well, he would do his best, and use it for the best; he thought of one person who might have told him what to do, with whom, if fate had been propitious, he would gladly have shared these sweet moors and wild-flowers, these fresh winds and foaming torrents, but she had failed him, and sent him away with harsh words that haunted him still.

James, when they started again, brought him a light for his pipe, and the two trudged off together. James still went ahead. The dogs followed baying.

'So t' Squoire's in his grave,' said James. 'He were a good friend to us,' he said. 'I'm glad no strangers coom t' fore. Ye should a' cottoned oop t' old man, Mr. Frank.'

'What could I do, James?' said Frank, after a moment's silence. 'He forbade me the house. I am only here now by a chance. If there had been a will, I should probably have been far away.'

'T'wer' no cha-ance,' said old James. 'He ne'er thought o' disinheritin' ye; he were a proud ma-an. T'wer' a moonth sin' I last saw t' ould man. He said, "Wall! I'm a-going from Pebblesthwaite. Ye'll hav' another master, James, afore long; tell him t' thin the Walden wood, and tak' Mr. Fra-ank down t' hollow whar t' covers lie." He took on sorely ne'er seeing ye, sir.'

Frank turned very red. 'I wish I had known it sooner, James.'

Frank came home from his talk with his keeper in a softened and grateful mind. The thought that no injustice had been meant, that his grandfather had been thinking of him with kindness, touched him, and made him ashamed of his long rancour. Now he could understand it all, for he felt that in himself were the germs of this same reticence and difficulty of expression. The letter he had thought so unkind had only meant kindness. It was too late now to regret what was past, and yet the thought of the dead man's goodwill made him happier than he could have supposed possible. The whole place looked different, more home-like, less bristling with the past; the lonely little ghost of his childhood was exorcised, and no longer haunted him at every turn.

Frank, notwithstanding his outward calm, was apt to go to extremes when roused, and, after a few mornings spent over accounts with Mr. Close, he gave that gentleman very plainly to understand that, although he did not choose to

criticise what had passed, he wished his affairs to be conducted, in future, in an entirely different manner. The cottages were in a shameful state of disrepair; the rents were exorbitantly high for the accommodation given. . .

Mr. Close stared at Frank. The young Squire must be a little touched in the head. When Raban, carried away by his vexation, made him a little speech about the duties of a country gentleman and his agent, Mr. Close said, 'Very true, sir. Indeed, sir? Jest so.' But he did not understand one word of it, and Frank might just as well have addressed one of the fat oxen grazing in the field outside.

'You will find I have always studied your interests, sir,' said Mr. Close, rubbing his hands, 'and I shall continue to do so. Perhaps you will allow me to point out that the proposed improvements will amount to more than you expect. You will have heavy expenses, sir. Some parties let their houses for a time: I have an offer from a wealthy gentleman from Manchester,' said the irrepressible Close.

Frank shortly answered that he did not wish to let the house, and that he must arrange for the improvements. A domestic revolution was the consequence, for when the new master proposed to reduce the establishment, the butler gasped, choked, and finally burst into tears. He could not allow such aspersions upon his character. What would his old master and mistress have said? His little savings were earned by faithful service, and sooner than see two underfootmen dismissed, he should wish to leave.

Mrs. Roper, the housekeeper, also felt that the time was come for rest and a private bar. She had been used to three in the kitchen, and she should not be doing her duty by herself if she said she could do with less.

Raban let them all go, with a couple of years' wages. For the present he only wanted to be left alone. He stayed on with a groom and a couple of countrywomen sent in by

Mrs. Brand. They clattered about the great kitchen, and their red shock heads might be seen half a mile off. Of course the neighbours talked: some few approved; old friends who had known him before troubled themselves but little; the rest loudly blamed his proceedings. He was a screw: he had lived on a crust, and he now grudged every halfpenny. He was cracked (this was Mr. Close's version); he had been in a lunatic asylum; he had murdered his first wife.

When the county began to call in friendly basket-carriages and waggonettes, it would be shown in by Betty and Becky to the library and the adjoining room, in which Mr. Raban lived. Frank had brought the lurcher away from the keeper's lodge; it had made friends with the foxy terrier, and the two dogs would follow him about, or lie comfortably on the rug while he sat at work upon his papers. The periwigged ancestor looked on from the wall, indifferently watching all these changes. One table in the window was piled with business papers, leases, cheque-books, lawyers' letters in bundles. A quantity of books that Frank had sent for from London stood in rows upon the floor. After the amenities and regularities of the last few years, this easy life came as a rest and reinvigoration. He did not want society. Frank was so taken up with schemes for sweeping clean with his new broom, that he was glad to be free for a time, and absolved from the necessity of dressing, of going out to dinner, and making conversation. He would open his windows wide on starry nights. The thymy wind would sough into his face; clear beam the solemn lights; the woods shiver softly. Does a thought come to him at such times of a sick woman in an old house far away, of a girl with dark brows and a tender smile, watching by her bedside?

People who had been used to the pale and silent college tutor in his stuff-gown, might scarcely have recognised

Frank riding about from farm to farm in the new and prosperous character of a country gentleman, be-gaitered and be-wideawaked. The neighbours who exclaimed at the shabbiness of Mr. Frank's indoor establishment might also, and with more reason, exclaim at the regiment of barrows and men at work, at the drains digging, roofs repairing, fences painting. The melancholy outside, tumble-down looking houses were smartening up. The people stood at their doors watching with some interest and excitement the works as they hammered on.

Frank superintended it all himself. He was up to his waist in a ditch one day when the Henley party drove past in the break on their way to call at Ravensrick. They left a heap of cards—Sir Thomas and Lady Henley, Mr. Jonah Anley, Captain Boswarrick—and an invitation for him to dine and sleep the following day. The red-headed girls took the cards in, and grinned at the fine company; the fine company grinned in return at Sukey.

'Why, what sort of society can he have been used to?' cried little Mrs. Boswarrick. She was the eldest daughter: a pretty, plump little woman, very much spoilt by her husband, and by her father, too, whose favourite she was.

'He has evidently not been used to associate with butlers and footmen,' said Mr. Anley.

'Hulloh!' shouted Sir Thomas, as he drove out at the park-gates. 'Look there, Anley! he is draining Medmere, and there is a new window to the schools. By Jove!'

'Foolish young man!' said Mr. Anley, 'wasting his substance, draining cottages and lighting school-rooms!' and he looked out with some interest.

'Then, Uncle Jonah, you are foolish yourself,' said Bell.

'Are you turned philanthropist, Uncle Jonah?' said Mrs. Boswarrick. 'I wish some one would take me and Alfred up. What have you been doing?'

'I make it a rule never to do anything at the time that can be put off till the morrow,' said Mr. Anley, apologetically. 'My cottages were tumbling down, my dear, so I was obliged to prop them up.'

'He bought them from papa,' said Bell. 'I can't think why.'

'It is all very well for bachelors like you and Raban to amuse yourselves with rebuilding,' said Sir Thomas, joining in from his box in an aggravated tone; 'if you were a married man, Anley, with a wife and daughters and milliners' bills, you would see how much was left at the end of the year for improvements.'

'To hear them talk, one oughtn't to exist at all,' says Mrs. Boswarrick, with a laugh.

CHAPTER XLIV.

WHITE WITH GAZING.

The tender heart beat no more; it was to have no more pangs, no more doubts, no more griefs and trials: its last throb was love!

—PENDENNIS.

The Harbingers are come: see, see their mark!
White is their colour. . . .

—G. HERBERT.

FRANK accepted Lady Henley's invitation and arrived at Henley Court just before dinner-time one day. The place lies beyond Pebblesthwaite, on the Smokethwaite road. It was a more cheerful house than Ravensrick—a comfortable, modern, stone-piled house, built upon a hill, with windows north and south, and east and west, with wide distant views of valleys and winding roads and moors. Through one break of the hills, when the wind blew south, the chimneys of Smokethwaite stood out clear against the sky; at other times a dull black cloud hung over the gap. The garden was charming: on one side a natural terrace overhung the valley; a copper beech rustled upon the lawn; and a few great chestnut-trees gave shade in summer to the young people of the house, to the cows browsing in the meadow, who would come up to the boundary fence to watch Miss Bell's flirtations with gentle curiosity, or the children at play, or to listen to Sir Thomas reading out the newspaper. He had a loud voice and a secret longing for parliamentary

distinction. When he read the speeches he would round his periods, address Lady Henley as 'sir,' and imagine himself in his place, a senator in the company of senators. He was a stupid man, but hospitable, and popular in the neighbourhood, far more so than Lady Henley, who was greatly disliked. Bell was fast, handsome. Norah was a gentle, scatter-brained creature, who looked up to everybody; she especially adored her sister, Mrs. Boswarrick, who had captivated Captain Boswarrick one evening at a York ball, where she had danced down a whole regiment of officers. The captain himself was a small and languid man, and he admired energy in others. If Sir Thomas was fond of thundering out the debates, Captain Boswarrick had a pretty turn for amateur acting and reciting to select audiences. Some one once suggested private theatricals.

'Never while I live,' said Lady Henley, 'shall there be such mummeries in this house. If Alfred chooses to make a fool of himself and repeat verses to the girls, I have no objection, so long as he don't ask me to sit by.'

'I never should have thought of asking you to sit by, Lady Henley,' drawled Alfred.

When Frank was announced, he found the young ladies in fits of laughter, Captain Boswarrick declaiming in the middle of the room, with Squire Anley and Mr. Redmayne for audience. Everybody turned round, and the performance suddenly ceased when he entered. The Squire nodded without getting up.

'How d'ye do?' said Mrs. Boswarrick, holding out half-a-dozen bracelets. 'Mr. Raban forgets me, I can see. Sit down. Alfred hates being interrupted. Go on, Alfred!'

Captain Boswarrick's manner would quite change when he began to recite. He would stamp, start, gesticulate, and throw himself into the part with more spirit than could have been reasonably expected.

And now, with a glance at his wife, he began again with a stamp, and suddenly pointing—

> That morn owd York wor all alive
> Wi' leal an' merry hearts;
> For t' country foalks com' i' full drive
> I' gigs an' market-carts,
> An' girt lang trains, wi' whistlin' din,
> Com' w-w-whirrlin' up.

The little captain, suiting the action to the word, raised his arm with some action to represent the train. It was caught from behind by a firm grasp. Frank had not seen that he had been followed into the room by a stout little man in bran-new clothes, who joined the circle.

'Take care,' said the stranger,—he spoke with a slight Yorkshire accent. 'What are you about, yo'ng man? What is all this? Very fascinating, very brilliant, very seductive, very much so, but leading to—what?' with a sudden drop of the voice, and the hand he held. Bell went off into a shriek of laughter.

Captain Boswarrick flushed up. He might have resented the interruption still more if he had not been somewhat mollified by the string of compliments.

'Leading to —— You would have heard all about it, Mr. Stock, if you had not stopped him,' said Mr. Anley.

'Shall I make my meaning plainer?' said the little man, not heeding the interruption. 'Shall I tell you what I mean? Social intercourse, music, poetry,—dazzling, I own. I, too, have experienced the charm; I, too, have studied to please; but I have also discovered the vanity of vanities; so will you one day. A fact, though you don't believe me.'

'But in the meanwhile, Mr. Stock, don't grudge us our fun,' said Bessie Boswarrick, coming to the rescue.

'I don't grudge it; far from it,' said the stranger; 'I was just like you all once; now—I am not afraid of ridicule

—I can give you something better than that; better than that, better than that. You can choose between us: *his* poetry, *my* plain speaking. I'm a plain man,—a very plain man; he, brilliant, highly educated.'

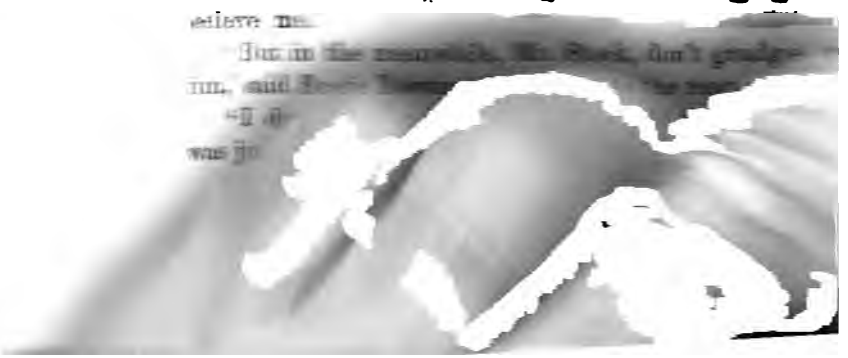
Captain Boswarrick scarcely knew how to accept all these compliments and in what sense to take them. Mr. Anley listened with the profoundest gravity. Bell giggled and stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth; but everybody was glad when the door opened and Lady Henley came in, making a diversion. The scene was getting embarrassing.

'After dinner, dear Mr. Stock,' said Joanna, courteously, 'we shall be glad to hear *anything* you may have to say. Let us leave them to their folly, Mr. Raban. Do you know your neighbour?—our excellent friend and minister?'

Frank was quite prepared to make Mr. Stock's acquaintance—he was an amateur preacher, a retired cavalry officer, living not far from Ravensrick—but he found himself carried off by Sir Thomas. The baronet had been in town that week, and was in a communicative mood. He had seen the ladies at Church House, who had asked after Raban. The Admiral had been heard of from Gibraltar.

'He has been writing in the most ill-judged way to know the exact state of affairs between Dolly and my nephew Robert,' Sir Thomas said confidentially. Sir Thomas always reflected the people with whom he had been living. 'I found my sister greatly overcome—hers is a nervous susceptibility, almost amounting to genius, but *not* under control.' And then, dropping his oratorical tone of voice, he went on to say that they all seemed much disturbed and greatly in want of cheering; that he had promised to run up again. 'Lady Sarah still lingering, poor thing,' he added. 'She has a most devoted nurse in my young niece.'

Frank asked as indifferently as he could how Miss Vanborough was looking.



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'Not so blooming as I could wish,' said Sir Thomas. 'Far from it. My wife is anxious that our friend, Mr. Stock, should impart some of his admirable ministration to her, but we cannot expect her to leave home at present.'

Mr. Stock's ministration seemed to have won over the simple baronet, whose conversation was deeply interesting to Frank, for he went on alternately praising Mr. Stock and talking about Dolly. Sir Thomas was not the discreetest of men. 'I had a—some painful explanation with my niece,' he continued, lowering his voice (people seem to think that is a sort of charm against indiscretion); 'to you, who are such an old friend, I may safely say that I do *not* like this vagueness and uncertainty in a matter which so closely concerns Dolly's happiness. The engagement seems to be neither on nor off. . . . She tells me that Robert is free, but she seems to consider herself bound. . . . I have thought it best to write to him plainly on the subject. . . . My wife, as you know, wishes the engagement entirely broken . . . at least I think so. . . .'

The baronet suddenly stopped short, and looking rather foolish, began to talk of Mr. Stock again.

Lady Henley was not so absorbed in her conversation that she had not overheard Sir Thomas's too candid confidences. She was shaking her head at her husband over her shoulder.

Frank moved away, and went and stared through one of the windows. Once more hope came to dazzle him. In some moods people grasp at faintest dreams. There was everything smiling, shining, every ridge seemed illuminated; there lay the happy valley flooded with sunlight, life, brightness. Children's voices reached him, and meanwhile the recitation had begun again. 'Yan morn in May,' the Captain was saying. But a loud dinner-bell brought it all to a close.

The sun had set, they had all done dinner. Norah used

to feed the cows of an evening with oat-cake prepared for Sir Thomas, and she now came out into the twilight, calling to her favourites, who stood expecting with their horns rearing against a golden streak. One bolder than the rest was making a hissing noise to attract attention, as Norah came out with her oat-cake. She called her favourites by name and softly stroked their long noses over the railings. Mr. Redmayne followed soon after, advancing with some precaution.

'Miss Norah,' he said, 'Mr. Stock is putting the drawing-room chairs in order—he evidently expects a large congregation. A Miss M'Grudder has come. Is it absolutely necessary that one should be present, or may one stop here and feed the cows?'

'I must go in,' said Norah, demurely. 'Here is the oat-cake, Mr. Redmayne,' and so saying she put the remains into his hand and tripped hastily away.

Mr. Redmayne, however, preferred to follow Miss Norah. Frank came out as the two went in together—he did not want to be present at the oration. He was distracted and thinking of many things.

Those few words of Sir Thomas had given him a strange longing to go back, if only for a day, to see Dolly again. He thought of his old friend also lying stricken. He had been very forgetful all these days past, and his conscience reproached him, and his inclination spoke too. There was an early train from Smokethwaite—he had business in town; why should he not go? Cruel girl! was she sad, and could he do nothing to help her?

As Frank walked up and down in the twilight, he would hear the boom of Mr. Stock's voice through the open drawing-room windows. When they started a hymn, the cows, who are fond of music, all crowded up to listen. As for Frank, he was in charity with all men, and prepared to

believe that all that people did was good. If Mr. Stock liked to give a peculiar expression to the faith which was in him, Raban for one had no mind to quarrel with it. His own was a silent belief: it seemed growing with happier emotions that were overflooding his heart, but it found its best expression in silence. He took leave of his hosts that evening when he went upstairs to bed.

The servant had put Frank into Jonah's room. It was a mistake—and Lady Henley did not know of it. There were the poor boy's pistols, his whips, on the wall boxing-gloves and foils. He had somehow got hold of one of those photographs of Dolly of which mention has been made, and hung it up over his chimney. There were a few books on the shelf, Captain Mayne Reid, *Ivanhoe*, a few old school-books and poetry-books, and Frank took one down. Frank thought very kindly of poor Jonah as he looked about at his possessions. He was a long time before he could get to sleep, and he got up and lighted his candle and read one of the books off the shelf—it happened to be Kingsley's *Andromeda*—till he fell asleep. Then it was only to dream a confused dream: Jonah fighting desperately with some finny monster, like that one on Lady Sarah's tiles, Dolly chained to a rock, and calling for help, while Mrs. Palmer and the Admiral stood wringing their hands on the shore. Was this George coming to their help? The monster changed to mist, out of which came lightning and thunder—the lightning was the gleam of a sword. The thunder shook the air; the mists parted; George, pale and wounded, stretched out his hand and gave Raban the sword; he looked weary with the fight; Frank in his dream rushed forward and struck wildly; the monster gave a horrible scream. He started up wide awake. He had left his window open; the morning mist had filled the room, but the scream was a real one; it was in his ears still. It came from the room

below; there was a stir of voices, then all was silent again.

When Frank came down to an early breakfast in the big dining-room he asked the butler if any one had been ill in the night. 'I heard a scream,' he said.

'It is my lady in her sleep,' the man answered. 'She often do scream at night since Mr. Jonah left.'

'I want my man called,' said Frank; 'I am going to town by the early train.'

As Frank was changing carriages at one of the stations, the London train went by, and he thought he saw a glimpse of a familiar face; a grey kid glove was waved. Surely it was Mrs. Palmer, on her way to Henley Court!

From DOROTHEA VANBOROUGH *to* ROBERT HENLEY, ESQ., *Calcutta.*

I HAVE been hoping for a chance letter, but none has come since that last one from Alexandria. Aunt Sarah is asleep; the house is empty, and I am writing to you in the oak-room by the window. Dear Robert, what shall I say in answer to your letter? That I *do* trust you; that I do know how to love you, and that you in turn must trust me. I could almost scold you for what you say about Mr. Raban if I did not think that you are only unfair because you love me. I never see him now. He is in Yorkshire; so is mamma—she is gone for a couple of days. As for me, I cannot leave Aunt Sarah, who depends upon me more and more. I had a long talk with my uncle before he left. He asked me a great many questions about you. He tells me he has written. I do not know what he has written; but please send him a nice letter. Dear Robert, it is so painful to me to be cross-questioned about your affection for me. I must speak honestly and without disguise to you of all people in the whole world, and so I will confess that if I had known all ——

Dolly, who had written thus far, looked up, for old Sam came into the room with a card.

'It's Mr. Raban, Miss,' said he.

Dolly blushed up crimson. 'I—I can't see him, Sam,' she answered. 'Aunt Sarah is asleep. Say I am engaged.'

Sam came back with Frank's card. 'Mr. Raban is in town till Monday, Miss.'

'Put down the card, Sam,' said Dolly, and she bent her head over her letter and went on writing.

Frank walked away disappointed. 'She might have spared five minutes to a friend who had come a hundred miles to see her,' he said to John Morgan that evening, as they walked back together to Frank's hotel. The waiter met Frank with a note, which had been left during his absence.

Raban suddenly brightened up; he read a few words, very stiff, very shy. 'Lady Sarah heard he had called, and wanted to see him; would he come the following day at five o'clock?' It was signed, 'Yours truly, Dorothea Vanborough.'

'Well,' said John Morgan, 'that is Dolly's writing, isn't it?'

'Yes,' said Frank. 'Lady Sarah wants to see me. As for Miss Vanborough, she seems to be studying the art of keeping old friends at a distance.'

'Nonsense,' said Morgan, 'since she asks you to go. What is the matter with you?'

The second time old Sam let Frank in at once, and showed him into the drawing-room. 'My lady will be ready directly,' he said.

Frank waited his summons; when he was tired of waiting he stepped out upon the terrace, attracted by the beauty of the autumnal evening, and wondering what inexpressible charm the old home had for him. Ravensrick, with all the graces of possession, did not seem to him so much like home as this silent old house where he had no right, no single stake; where the mistress lay stricken, and parting from this world; where Dolly lived, but where her heart's interest was not. Already strangers were speculating upon the fate of the old house, and wondering who would come there after Lady Sarah's death. And yet Frank Raban, as he paced the

terrace, felt a tranquil satisfaction and sense of completeness that existed for him in no other place.

When Dolly came into Lady Sarah's room to tell her that Frank was there, Marker, who had been sitting in a corner, got up gently and left the room. Lady Sarah was not asleep; she was sitting up on her sofa by the window, of which the sash was half raised to let in the air. Her grey hair was hanging loose; grey though it was, it fell in shining silver curls about the withered face.

'Is that you, Dolly? I have had a dream,' she said, a little wildly. 'Your father was standing by me and we were looking at a river, and George was a child again, and I held him in my arms, and when I looked into his face it was like the face of that Raphael child at Dresden. Look out,' she said, beginning to wander again, 'and tell me if the river is there.'

Dolly unconsciously obeyed, and looked out at the garden, in its shifting, changing lights and tremulous tones of radiance and golden-sombres. She could almost have imagined her aunt's dream to be true if Frank Raban had not been walking on the terrace. She looked back.

'Dear Aunt Sarah, it is the sunset that made you dream.'

'It was a dream,' said Lady Sarah, 'but I think I have sometimes seen that river before, Dolly. Christian and Christiana and all the company have crossed it.' Then, smiling: 'I am afraid I have been a tiresome old pilgrim at times.' She pushed back her grey hair and lay looking into the girl's face. 'It is nearly over now,' she said.

Dolly tried to speak, but some sudden tears seemed to choke her, and Lady Sarah stroked her hand.

'Try to be a thankful woman, Dolly,' she said. 'God has blessed you and given you love and trust in others. I see now where I failed.' Then, in her usual tone, she said, 'I should like to see Frank Raban again.'

Dolly was beginning to say that she would go for him, when Lady Sarah suddenly cried,—'Open the window wide! open! let the river come in.'

Dolly, frightened, threw open the pane, and, as she did so, some evening bell began to ring from a distant chapel, and a great flight of birds passed across the sky.

The next minute Frank from the terrace below heard a cry. It was Dolly calling for help.

'I am here,' he answered, and, without waiting to think, he sprang up the old oak staircase, and hurried along the passage to the door of Lady Sarah's room.

It was all dark in the passage, but the sun was in the room. Dolly was holding up her aunt in her arms; her strength seemed to be failing. Frank sprang to help her, and together they raised her up. A little soft breeze came in at the window, and Lady Sarah opened her eyes. She was still wandering.

'Is this George?' she said. 'I have been waiting for you, dear.'

Then she seemed to recognise Frank, and she let his hand fall upon his sleeve.

'Ah! he will take care of Dolly,' she whispered, 'for this is ——'

A quick silent brightness came into her face: it may have been some change in the sunset lights. She was dead—lying in a serene and royal peace.

CHAPTER XLV.

WHAT AUNT SARAH LEFT FOR DOLLY.

. . . One that was a woman, sir;
But, rest her soul—she's dead!

—SHAKSPEARE.

FOR an hour Frank kept watch alone in the empty rooms below. The doctor had come and gone. He said, as they knew he would, that all was over, there was nothing more to be done for Sarah Francis.

Frank had been for the doctor. He had sent a telegram to Mrs. Palmer; then he came back and waited below in the twilight room, out of which the mistress was gone for ever.

When death enters a house there is a moment's silence; then comes the silent tumult that follows death, everybody scared and bustling to the door, acquaintances leave their own names on bits of pasteboard, friends write notes, relations encamp in the dining-room, the pale faces of the living come and look at the place out of which a life has passed away. Servants come and go, busy with the fussy paraphernalia. It means kindness and honour to the dead, but it seems all contrived to make sorrow grotesque and horrible instead of only sorrowful.

When the rush of strangers and of neighbours came, it pushed in between Frank and the solemn silence up above. 'How had he come there?' they asked him. 'What had the doctor said?' 'How old was Lady Sarah?' 'Was it

known how things were left?' Then Frank heard Mrs. Morgan sending out for black-edged paper in a whisper, and he started up and left them, for it all jarred upon him and he could bear it no longer.

He went up and stood for a minute at the door of the room where he had left Dolly in her first burst of grief. At the moment the door opened softly, and Marker came out. Frank turned away, but in that instant he saw it all again. The light had passed away, but some stars were shining through a mist, and Dolly was kneeling in the silver shadow, with a pale upturned face.

There was no sound. As Frank walked away he thought of two peaceful faces in that upper chamber. Death might be in that room, but sorrow waited abashed for a time in the presence of the Peace of Peace.

Alas! though Dolly's friend was faithful and strong, and would gladly have saved her from all sorrow and wiped all tears from her eyes, it was in vain he wished her good wishes; poor Dolly's cup that day was filled to the very brim with a draught more bitter than she knew of as she knelt in that silent room.

The sun had set upon a day long to be remembered, when a great victory was won. Since mid-day the guns had been thundering along the heights, the waters of the Alma were crimson in the sunset. The long day was over now, the heights were won, the dreadful guns were silent; but all that night men were awake and at work upon the battle-field, sailors from the fleet and others bringing help to the wounded, carrying them to the shore, and burying the dead.

* * * * *

They laid Lady Sarah in her grave one quite autumn day, and came away silently. The blinds were drawn up when they got back to Church House, all the windows were open, the people who had not loved her came and went

freely now; it struck Dolly strangely to hear Mrs. Palmer calling Julie over the stairs. There was a little water-colour of Lady Sarah in her youth, with a dislocated arm and a harp, that George and Dolly had often laughed over together. Now, as she took it down from the niche by the window in the oak room, a sudden burst of longing tears came raining over her hands and the glass, dimming the simpering lady in water-colours. Dolly felt at that minute how much she would have given to have had a fuller explanation with her aunt. A complete clearing up between them had never come in words, and yet the look of Lady Sarah's tender eyes following her about the room, the clasp of that silent hand seemed to say, 'I understand, I trust you,' more plainly than words. 'I have done as you wished,' she had said. Was George forgiven too?

And now at least there were no more hidden things between them, and all was peace in that troubled life. It seemed hard to Dolly at this parting time to be separated from the two she most loved—from Robert and from George—who would have shared her grief. Her long watch had told upon her strength and spirits; every sound made her start, and seemed the harbinger of bad news. She had a longing fancy, of which John Morgan told Frank one day: she wanted to go off to the East, to be allowed to nurse her brother on the spot, and she would learn as others had done if need be. John Morgan spoke of a friend, Mrs. Fane, who had a home for training nurses; would he not take her there one day? John Morgan agreed to take Dolly to Mrs. Fane's if she wished it. He was glad to do anything she told him, but as for her scheme, they were all opposed to it. She was not strong enough to bear much fatigue. And so, as the kindest people do, they condemned her to ease, to rest of body, to wearing trouble of mind.

'We should have her laid up, sir, if we let her go,' said

John Morgan; 'and she is a good girl, and has promised to wait patiently until she hears from George. Robert, I am sure, would greatly disapprove of such a plan.'

'I have been thinking of going to the East myself,' said Frank, who had made up his mind for about two seconds. 'Some men I know are taking out stores in a yacht, and want me to join them. If you see Miss Vanborough—I never see her—will you tell her I am going, and will find out her brother . . .?'

'You had better tell her yourself,' said John Morgan. 'I am sure she would like to know it from you.' Frank only shook his head.

Frank Raban used to come to Church House every day; he saw Sir Thomas, who had come up; he saw Mrs. Palmer; but, except once, he never saw Dolly. Sometimes he could hear her step turn at the door, once he saw her black dress as she walked away. One day, having gone upstairs, summoned by Mrs. Palmer, he looked through a window and caught sight of Dolly in the distance, sitting wrapped in a shawl, on the bench at the garden-end, alone, by the pond where she and George used to go together. She knew Raban was in the house. She waited there until he was gone.

What strange feeling was it that made her avoid Frank Raban of all the people that came to the house? Was she not generous enough to forget what had passed that day by the fountain?

'You are quite cold, my dear child,' said her mother, when Dolly came in pale and shivering. 'Why did you not come in before?'

She had asked herself that very question that day. It was one she could not answer. It was no want of trust in him, no want of gratitude for his kindness, that made her unkind. This much she told herself. She acted by an instinct, and she was right to follow it. She belonged to

Robert. She had deliberately given him her word, her love, her trust. It was not a half fidelity, a half love that she had promised, and she would be true to her word and to herself. Only it seemed to be her fate, and to come round again and again in her life, short as it was, that what she loved should be at variance with what she felt; that, loving truth, and longing for one simple and uncomplicated response and sympathy, she found herself hesitating, fearing to look forward, living from day to day with a secret consciousness of something that she would not face.

This was the saddest time of Dolly's life. Brighter days were to come; hours that she had not yet dreamt of were in store for her; but the present was cold and drear: and though chill winds of spring help to ripen a heart for happiness in later life as well as the warm summer rays, Dolly could not know this yet.

One thing remained to be done. It interested no one less than those principally concerned. Lady Sarah's will was to be read; and Frank received a note from Mr. Tapeall, inviting him to come to Church House at a certain time. To-day, thanks to the lawyer's letter, he met Dolly at last. She was coming downstairs as he was crossing the hall. Her black dress made her look older, more stately. She seemed to him to change every time he met her now; and yet when she spoke she was herself again. She smiled a little, gave him her hand. She seemed inclined to say something, but she stopped short, and walked on into the drawing-room, where the others were already waiting. The Morgans were there, and Rhoda, all sitting silently round the room.

It was a dull and dismal afternoon: the rain splashed, the sky came down in gray, vaporous glooms; the red tape was the most cheerful thing in the room. Mr. Tapeall sat untying his parcels at the table; Sir Thomas, with a silver

pencil-case and crossed legs, was prepared to listen attentively, and make notes, if necessary. Mr. Tapeall looked round. 'We are all here,' he said, drawing in his chair. 'It is unfortunate that Admiral Palmer should not have been able to arrive in time.'

As Mr. Tapeall looked round, Mrs. Palmer replied, with a languid shrug, 'We are used to do without him, Mr. Tapeall. I had proposed that he should meet me at Paris, but of course he makes his usual difficulties. What a climate!' she said. 'Just look at the atmosphere! And yet the Admiral wishes to keep us in this dreadful country!'

'Dear Philippa, this is not the moment. If you will kindly listen to our excellent—to Mr. Tapeall,' Sir Thomas began, in his oratorical voice.

Mrs. Palmer put on the resigned air, and murmured something about the climate, with an expressive glance at the window; Dolly sat listening, looking down, and quite silent; Frank thought of the first time he had seen her sitting by the fire. Mr. Tapeall began. 'Lady Sarah had intended to execute a more formal document, which I have had prepared from the memorandum in my possession,' said he, 'of which I will, with your permission, at once proceed to read the contents.'

And so in the silence, by Mr. Tapeall's voice, Sarah Francis spoke for the last time in a strange jargon that in her life time she had never used. Her house at Kensington, in the county of Middlesex; her house in Yorkshire, in the parish of Pebblesthwaite; all other her messuages, tenements; all her personal property, monies invested in Government or landed securities, her foreign bonds, &c. &c., she left to her nephew, George Francis Vanborough, of All Saints' College, Cambridge. If he should die without issue [redacted] will, it was to revert to Dorothea Jane Vanborough, of

Church House, in the parish of Kensington, to whom she left her blessing, and, at the said Dorothea's own wish, nothing but the picture in the dining-room, as a token of affection, confidence, and most loving remembrance, and her trinkets. There were also legacies:—250*l.* to the Rev. John Morgan; 275*l.* to Frank Raban, Esq.; and, to Philippa's utter amazement and surprise, the sum of 5,000*l.* to Philippa, the wife of Admiral Hawtry Palmer, which was to revert to Dolly at her mother's death. There were legacies to Marker and old Sam. Mr. Tapeall and Frank Raban were appointed trustees and executors.

'But the will is not signed,' said Sir Thomas, making a note.

'The memorandum is signed and attested,' said Mr. Tapeall. 'Lady Sarah had proposed making me sole trustee, but to that I objected; she then suggested Mr. Raban.'

'I *quite* understand,' said Dolly, starting up and looking suddenly bright and beaming. 'I am so glad,' she said, and her eyes filled with tears.

'My dear child, we deeply feel for you,' said Mrs. Morgan, stepping forward with a heavy foot.

Raban too glanced rather anxiously; but he was reassured: there was no mistaking the look of relief and content in the girl's face. It was as if her aunt had spoken; a sign to Dolly that she had forgiven the past; and George must come home now, he must be happy now; all was as she wished, his long disgrace was over; she clasped her two hands together.

Mr. Tapeall continued—'The whole thing has been complicated by previous trusts and claims, making it desirable that the estate should be administered by a business man. This was Lady Sarah's reason for making me trustee,' said Mr. Tapeall. 'For the present my co-trustee's presence

will not be necessary,' and he politely bowed to Frank Raban.

'Thomas, did you hear? 5,000*l.*!' cried Mrs. Palmer. 'The poor dear extraordinary old thing must have lost her head. Why, we *detested* each other. However, it is quite right; yes, it would have been a thousand pities to dwell upon trifles. As for my poor Dolly, I must say I do not at all see why George is to have all those things and Dolly nothing at all. Dolly, what *will* Robert say, poor fellow? *How* disappointing. Come here, dearest, and let me give you a kiss.'

Dolly smiled as she bent over her mother. 'I did not want it, mamma; you will let me live with you.' And then, as she raised her head, her eyes met Raban's anxious glance with a frank smiling answer.

Rhoda sat perfectly bewildered and amazed. Was George heir after all? Was this a part that Dolly was acting? Everything to George. Rhoda began to think vaguely that there was George's chair, his carpet, his four walls, and there might have been her carpet, her chair. It might have been hers. Her head seemed going round; she was in a rage with herself, with her Aunt Morgan, with everybody. As for Dolly, she did not know about poverty. How admiringly Mr. Raban had looked at her. How strangely Dolly was behaving. After all, thought Rhoda enviously, hearing Mrs. Palmer chatter on to Mr. Tapeall, Dolly would be cared for.

'Certainly, winter abroad,' Mrs. Palmer was saying. 'I require change and rest and a warmer clime, Mr. Raban. You must bring George back to us at Paris. So you really go to-morrow! What a curious sum she has left you; really the poor dear seems peculiar to the last. How much did you say, Mr. Tapeall—5,000*l.*—is it only 200*l.* a year?'

'Mr. Vanborough should be communicated with at once,'

said Mr. Tapeall. 'I presume he has left no instructions?'

Mrs. Palmer here began shaking her head emphatically. 'He had nothing to leave,' she cried. 'Nonsense, Dolly: that paper you have is nothing at all. Yes, Mr. Raban, we must meet at Paris,' she continued, changing the subject, 'when you come back, as you say, to see to poor Sarah's affairs. It is, however, quite enough that I should be attached to any one or any thing——'

'Philippa,' said Sir Thomas, coming up with a note he had just made, 'Tapeall wishes to know something more about this paper of George's. Do you know anything of it?'

'Oh! you may tell Tapeall to burn it,' said Mrs. Palmer, indifferently. 'It is nothing.'

'I think it is a will, mamma,' said Dolly, steadily. 'I will give it to Mr. Tapeall, and he can judge.' And she left the room to fetch the paper.

'You know nothing of business, my dear Philippa,' said the baronet, with a grim smile. 'Tapeall must not burn wills that are sent to him to keep.'

'Shall I ask him to give it back to me?' said Mrs. Palmer, rapidly, in a low voice. 'It is only some whim of the boy's. He could not know of poor Sarah's extraordinary arrangements, putting everything out. How childish of Dolly to have spoken of the paper to Tapeall. Pray don't make so much noise with your fingers,' for the baronet, who had many restless little tricks, was drubbing the table energetically.

Frank came up to take leave, and no more was said at the time. He was to be away for two months, and meanwhile Mr. Tapeall had promised to act for him.

Mrs. Palmer was very much annoyed with Dolly. She treated her with great coldness, and, to show her displeasure, invited Rhoda to come out with her for a drive every day.

As they went along she used to ask Rhoda a great many inconsistent questions, which Rhoda could not in the least understand. Rhoda wondered what she meant.

One day they drove to Gray's Inn. Mrs. Palmer said she liked to explore odd nooks. Then she had a chance idea, and stopped the carriage at Mr. Tapeall's office, and went up to see him. She came down smiling, flushed, and yet almost affectionate in her manner to the grim, bald-headed lawyer, who followed her to the door.

'Do as you like, dear Mr. Tapeall. As a mother, I should have treasured the memorandum. Of course, your scruples do you the greatest credit. Good-morning.'

'A complete fool, my dear,' said she, with a sudden change of manner to Rhoda, as the carriage drove off; 'and as for your friend Dolly, she has not common sense.'

'Would he not do what you wanted?' said Rhoda, wonderingly. 'What a stupid, tiresome man. But oh, Mrs. Palmer, I'm afraid he heard what you said.'

'I do not care if he did. He would do nothing but bob his vulgar bald head,' cried Mrs. Palmer, more and more irate. 'Coachman, drive to Hyde Park Gardens; coachman, go to Marshall and Snellgrove's. I suppose, Rhoda, you would not know your way home from here on foot?' said Mrs. Palmer, very crossly. 'Of course I must take you back, but it is quite out of the way. What is that they are crying in the street? It ought to be forbidden. Those wretched creatures make one quite nervous.'

As Rhoda waited at the shop door, she heard them still crying the news; but two people passing by said, 'It is nothing. There is no news;' and she paid no more heed to the voices. But this time there was truth in the lying voices. News had come, and the terrible details of the battle were all in the paper next day.

Sir Thomas came to the house early, before any one was

up, and carried off the papers, desiring the servants to let no one in until his return. He came back in a couple of hours, looking fagged and wearied. He heard with dismay that Dolly had gone out. Mrs. Palmer was still in her room. Terrible news had come, and words failed him to tell it.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SORROWFUL MESSAGE.

I have no wealth of grief; no sobs, no tears,
Nor any sighs, no words, no overflow,
Nor storms of passion; no reliefs; yet oh!
I have a leaden grief, and with it fears
Lest they who think there's nought where nought appears
May say I never loved him.

—Hon. Mrs. Knox.

Dolly was with John Morgan. At that minute they were coming up the steps at the end of a narrow street near the Temple. The steps led up from the river, and came from under an archway. The morning was fine, and the walk had brought some colour into Dolly's pale cheeks as she came up, emerging from the gloom of the arch. John thought he had not seen her look so like herself for a long time past. Dolly liked the quaint old street, the steps, the river beyond, the alternate life and sleep of these old City places.

As they came along, John Morgan had been telling Dolly something that had touched her and made her forget for a time the sad preoccupations from which she found it so difficult to escape. He had been confiding in her—George had known the story he told her—no one else. It was a melancholy, middle-aged episode of Mrs. Carbury's faithlessness. 'She had waited so long,' said poor John, 'and with so much goodness, that it has, I confess, been a blow

to me to find that her patience could ever come to an end. I can't wonder at it, but it has been a disappointment. She is Mrs. Philcox now. Philcox is a doctor at Brighton. . . . It is all over now,' said John, slowly, 'but I was glad to leave Kensington at the time.'

'I am so sorry and so glad, too, for she could not have been at all worthy of you,' cried Dolly, sympathising. 'Of course, she ought to have waited. People who love don't count time.'

'Hush, my dear girl,' said John. 'She was far too good for me, and I was a selfish fool to hope to keep her. How could I expect her to wait for me? What man has a right to waste a woman's life in uncertainty?'

'Why, I am waiting for Robert,' said Dolly.

John muttered uncomfortably that that was different. 'Robert is a very different person to me,' said John. 'This is the house.'

'What a nice old house,' said Dolly. 'I should like to live here for a little.' John rang at the bell. It was a door with a handsomely carved lintel, over which a few odd bow-windows were built out to get gleams of the river. There was a blank wall, too, leading to the arch; the steady stream of traffic dinned in the distance of the misty street end.

Mrs. Fane lived in one of the streets that lead out of the Strand. At one time she had worked for the Sisters of St. James, who lived not far off; but when, for various reasons, she ceased to become an active member of the community, she set up a little house of refuge, to which the Sisters often sent their convalescents. She had a sick kitchen for people who were leaving the hospitals, weak still and unfit for their work: mutton-chops and words of encouragement were dealt out to them; a ground-floor room had been fitted up as a reading-room, in which she gave weekly banquets of strong congou and dripping-cake, such as her guests

approved. She was a clever, original-minded woman; she had once thought of being a Sister, but life by rule had become intolerable to her, and she had gone her own way, and set to work to discover a clue of her own in the labyrinth in which people go wandering in pursuit of the good intentions which are said to lead to a dreary terminus. London itself may be paved with good intentions for all we know. Who shall say what her stones might cry out if they had voices? But there they lie cold and hard and silent, except for the monotonous roll of the wheels passing on from suburbs to markets, to docks, and to warehouses, those cities within a city.

Charlotte Fane's clue in the labyrinth was a gift for other people's happiness, and a sympathy that no sorrow could ever over-darken. She had not been beautiful in her youth, but now in her middle age all her life seemed written in her kind face, in the clear brown eyes, in the gentle rectitude of her understanding sympathy. Some human beings speak to us unconsciously of trust and hope, as others, in their inner discordance, seem to jar and live out before our very eyes our own secret doubts and failings, and half-acknowledged fears.

I have a friend, a philosopher, who thinks more justly than most philosophers. The other day when he said, 'To be good is such a tremendous piece of luck,' we all laughed, but there was truth in his words, and I fear this luck of being born good, does not belong to all the people in my little history. John Morgan is good. His soul and his big body are at peace, and evenly balanced. Everything is intensely clear to him. The present is present, the past is past. Present the troubles and the hopes of the people among whom he is living; past the injuries and disappointments, the failures and grievances of his lot; once over they are immediately put away and forgotten. Charlotte Fane's instincts were

higher and keener, perhaps, than the curate's, but she, too, was born in harmony with sweet and noble things.

'Yes,' said Morgan, 'I come here whenever I want help and good advice. There are a few sick people upstairs that I visit. Mrs. Fane will show you her little hospital. Two of her nurses have just gone out to the East. She has been nursing some cholera patients with great success. I sent a letter to *The Times* on the subject; I don't know if they have put it in; I have not seen the paper to-day.' As he spoke, there came a sudden, deep, melodious sound.

'That is Big Ben,' said John. 'Three-quarters. We are late.' The strokes fell one by one and filled the air and echoed down the street; they seemed to sound above the noise and the hurry of the day.

Dolly remembered afterwards how a man with an organ had come to the end of the street and had begun playing that tune of Queen Hortense's as they went into the house. The door was opened by a smiling-looking girl in a blue dress with some stiff white coiffe and a big apron.

'Mrs. Fane expected them; she would be down directly; would Mr. Morgan go up and speak to her first? Mrs. Connor was dying they feared. Would the lady wait in the nurses' sitting-room?' The little maid opened the door into a back room looking on to a terrace, beyond which the river flowed. There was a bookcase in the room: some green plants were growing in the window, a photograph hung over the chimney of one of Mr. Royal's pictures. Dolly knew it again, that silent figure, that angel that ruled the world; she had come face to face with the solemn face since she had looked at the picture two years ago in the painter's studio. Seeing it brought back that day very vividly—the young men's talk in the green walk: how Rhoda startled her when she came from behind the tree. The clocks were still going on tolling out the hour one by one and ringing it out with prosy

reiteration, some barges were sailing up the river, some children were at play, and the drone of that organ reached her occasionally; so did the dull sound of voices in the room overhead. She saw two more white caps pass the window. She had waited some minutes, when she saw a paper lying on a chair, and Dolly, remembering John's letter to *The Times*, took it up and looked to see if it had been inserted. The letter was almost the first thing she saw, and she read it through quietly. It was signed 'Clericus,' and advocated a certain treatment for cholera. Long afterwards she talked it over quite calmly; then she turned the page. A quarter of an hour had passed by, for the clock in the room had begun to strike twelve. Did it strike into her brain? Did the fatal words come with a shriek from the paper? What was this? For a minute she sat stunned, staring at the printed words—then she knew that she had known it all along, that she never had had hope not for one instant since he left them. For one minute only she could not believe that harm had happened to him, and that was the minute when she read a list printed in pitiless order—'Killed on the 20th of September; wounded at the battle of the Alma; died on the following day of wounds received in action, Captain Errington Daubigney, Lieutenant Alexander Thorpe, —th Regiment, Ensign George Francis Vanborough. . . There were other names following, but she could read no more. No one heard her cry, 'My George, oh, my George!' but when the door opened and two nurses came in quietly in their white coiffes and blue dresses, they found a poor black heap lying upon the floor in the sunlight.

* * * * *

I heard a sailor only the other day telling some women of his watch on the night of the Alma, and how he had worked on with some of the men from his ship, and as they went he searched for the face of a comrade who came from

his own native town. 'His friends lived next door to us,' said Captain B——, 'and I had promised his mother to look after him. I could hear nothing of the poor fellow. They said he was dead, and his name was in the papers; and they were all in mourning for him at home, when he walked in one day long after. They found it harder to tell his mother that he was alive than that he was dead.' Alas! many a tender heart at home had been struck that day by a deadly aim from those fatal heights for whom no such happy shock was in store.

'If it had not been for George,' Jonah afterwards wrote to his mother, 'you would never have seen me again.'

On that deadly slope, as they struggled up through the deadly storm of which 'the hail lashed the waters below into foam,' Jonah fell, wounded in the leg, and as he fell the bugles sounded, and he was left alone and surrounded. A Russian came up to cut him down. He had time to see the muzzle of a gun deliberately aimed. Jonah himself could hardly tell what happened. Suddenly some soldier, springing from behind, fired, and the gun went up, and Jonah was able to struggle to his feet. He saw his new ally run one man through with his bayonet, and then, with his clenched fist, strike down a third who had come to close quarters. It was a gallant rescue. When a moment came to breathe again Jonah turned. 'Thank you, my man,' he gasped. The man looked at him and smiled. Jonah's nerves were sharpened, for even in that instant he recognised George dressed in his private's dress: his cap had gone, and he was bare-headed.

As Jonah exclaimed, he was carried on by a sudden rush from behind; he looked back, and he thought he saw George leap forward and fall. It was a sudden rally—a desperate push—men fell right and left. The Colonel, too, was down a few paces off, and then came a blinding crash.

Jonah himself was knocked over a second time by a spent shell. When he came to himself, he was being carried to the rear, and the tide of battle had swept on.

That night, while Dolly was at home watching in the mourning house, two men were searching along a slope beyond a vineyard, where a fierce encounter had taken place. A village not far off had been burned to the ground; there were shreds and wrecks of the encounter lying all about. Some sailors came up with lanterns and asked the men what they were doing.

'They were looking for a man of their own corps. The Colonel had been making inquiry,' said the two soldiers. A reward had been offered—it was to be doubled if they brought him in alive.

'A gentleman run away from his friends,' said one of the men. 'There is an officer in the Guards has offered the money; he's wounded himself, and been carried to the shore.'

'Do you take money for it?' said one of the sailors, turning away, and then he knelt down and raised some one in his arms, and turned his lantern upon the face.

It was that of a young fellow, who might have seemed asleep at first. He had been shot through the temple in some close encounter. There was no mark except a dull red spot where the bullet had entered. He had been lying on his back on the slope, with his feet towards the sea; his brows were knit, but his mouth was smiling.

'Why, that's him, poor fellow!' said Corporal Smith, kneeling down and speaking below his breath. 'So he's dead: so much the worse for him, and for us too—twenty pound is twenty pound.'

'Here is a letter to his sweetheart,' said one of the sailors, laying the head gently down, and holding out a letter that had fallen from the dead man's belt.

'Miss Vanbur — Vanborough; that's the name,' said Smith.

The sailors had moved on with their lanterns: they had but little time to give to the dead in their search for the living; and then the soldiers, too, trudged back to the camp.

All that night George lay still under the stars, with a strange look of Dolly's own steadfast face that was not there in life. It was nobler than hers now, tear-stained and sorrowing, in the old house at home. Afterwards, looking back, it seemed some comfort to Dolly to remember how that night of mourning had been spent, not discordantly separated from her George whom she had loved, but with him in spirit.

All that night George lay still under the stars. In the morning, just at sunrise, they laid him in his grave. A breeze blew up from the sea in the soldiers' faces, and they could hear the echo of some music that the French were playing on the heights. Some regiment was changing quarters, and the band was playing 'Partant pour la Syrie,' and the music from the heights swelled over the valley. Then the armies passed on to fresh battle, leaving the soldiers who had fallen lying along the valley and by the sea.

Jonah, on board ship, heard a rumour that George had been found desperately wounded, but alive. When he came back to the camp he found, to his bitter disappointment, that it was but a vain hope. George's name was on the list of the officers who had died of their wounds on the day after the battle. That unlucky reward had made nothing but confusion. Smith and his companion declared they had found him alive and sent him to the shore to be taken on board. He must have died on the way, they said. Jonah paid the twenty pounds without demur when the men came

to claim it. The letter they brought made their story seem true. Jonah asked them a few questions. 'Did he send me this letter for his sister?' he said: 'was he able to speak?'

Jonah was choking something down as he tried to speak quietly.

'He sent his duty, sir,' said Smith, 'and gave me the letter. He said we should meet in a better world.'

'Did he use those words?' said Jonah, doubtfully. Something in the man's tone seemed odd to him.

Smith gained courage as he went on. 'He couldn't speak much, poor gentleman. Joe can tell you as well as me. He said, "Smith, you are a good fellow," says he, didn't he, Joe?'

Joe did not like being appealed to, and stopped Smith short. 'Come along,' he said, gruffly, 'the Captain don't want you now.'

Jonah let them go. He was giddy and weak from illness, and overcome. He began to cry, poor fellow, and he did not want them to see it; he walked up and down, struggling with his grief. His was a simple, grateful heart.

Colonel Fane, too, saw the men, who had gained confidence, and whose story seemed probable: they said nothing of the money that Jonah had offered. Poor George's commission had come only the day before the battle. Colonel Fane sent his name home with the list of the officers who had fallen. He thought of the sweet-looking girl, his old friend's daughter, and remembered their talk together. His heart ached for her as he wrote her a few words of remembrance and feeling for her sorrow. His praise of George was Dolly's best comfort at that miserable time, and the few words he enclosed written by her brother on the very morning of the battle.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FROM HEART OF VERY HEART.

Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.
—R. Browning.

It was as well perhaps that the cruel news should have come to Dolly as it did, suddenly, without the torture of apprehension, of sympathy. She knew the worst now, she had seen it printed for all the world to read; she knew the worst even while they carried her upstairs half conscious; some one said 'higher up,' and then came another flight, and she was laid on a bed and a window was opened, and a flapping handkerchief that she seemed to remember came dabbing on her face. It was evening when she awoke, sinking into life. She was lying on a little bed like her own, but it was not her own room. It was a room with a curious cross corner and a window with white curtains, through which the evening lights were still shining. There was a shaded green lamp in a closet opening out of the room, in the corner of which a figure was sitting at work with a coiffe like that one she had seen pass the window as she waited in the room down below.

A low sob brought the watcher to Dolly's side. She came up carrying the little shaded lamp. Dolly saw in its light the face of a sweet-looking woman that seemed strangely familiar. She said, 'Lie still, my dear child. I

will get you some food,' and in a few minutes she came back with a cup of broth, which she held to her lips, for to her surprise Dolly found that her hands were trembling so that she could not hold the cup herself.

'You must use my hands,' said the lady, smiling. 'I am Mrs. Fane. You know my brother David. I am a nurse by trade.'

And nursed by these gentle hands, watched by these kind eyes, the days went by. Dolly 'had narrowly escaped a nervous fever,' the doctor said. 'She must be kept perfectly quiet; she could not have come to a better place to be taken care of.'

Mrs. Fane reminded Dolly one day of their first meeting in Mr. Royal's studio. 'I have been expecting you,' she said, with a smile. 'We seem to belong to each other.'

Marker came, and was installed in the inner closet. One day Mrs. Palmer came bursting in with much agitation and many tears; she had one grand piece of news. 'The Admiral was come,' she said; 'he should come and see Dolly before long; but Mrs. Palmer's visit did the girl no good, and at a hint from Mrs. Fane, the Admiral also kept away. He left many parcels and friendly messages. They were all full of sympathy and kindness, and came many times a day to the door of the nurses' home. But Mrs. Fane was firm, and after that one visit from Mrs. Palmer she kept everyone out, otherwise they would all have wished to sit by Dolly's bed all day long. The kindness of leaving people alone is one which warm-hearted people find least easy to practise; and, in truth, the best quiet and completest rest comes with a sense of kindness waiting, of friends at hand when the time is come for them.

One evening, when Dolly was lying half asleep, dreaming of a dream of her waking hours, a heavy step came to the door, some one knocked, and when Marker opened with a

hush! a gruff voice asked how Dolly was, and grumbled something else, and then the step went stumping down to the sitting-room below. When Dolly asked who had knocked, Marker said, 'It was only an old man with a parcel, my dear. I soon sent him off,' she added, complacently.

Dolly was disappointed when Mrs. Fane, coming in, in the morning, told her that the Admiral had called the night before. He had left a message. He would not disturb the invalid. He had come to say that he was ordered off to Ireland on a special mission. He had brought some more guava jelly and tins of turtle soup, also a parcel of tracts, called 'The Sinners' Cabinet.' He told Mrs. Fane that he was taking Mrs. Palmer into Yorkshire, for he did not like leaving her alone. He also brought a note for Dolly. It was a hurried scrawl from Philippa:—

Church House, October 30.

DARLING,—My heart is torn. I am off to-morrow morning by cock-crow, *of course*, travelling in the same train, but in a *different carriage*, with my husband. This is his arrangement, not mine, for he knows that I cannot and will not submit to those odious fumes of tobacco. Dearest, how gladly would I have watched by your pillow for hours had Mrs. Fane permitted the mother that one sad privilege; but she is trained in a sterner school than I. And, since I must not be with you, come to me without delay. They expect you—your room is prepared. My brother will come for you at a moment's notice. You will find Thomas a far pleasanter travelling companion than Joanna (with whom you are threatened). *Do not hesitate between them.* As for the Admiral, he, as usual, wishes to arrange everything for everybody. Opposition is useless until he is gone. And heaven knows I have little strength wherewith to resist just now.

There was a P.S.

You may as well get that memorandum back from Tapeall if you can.

Dolly was not used to expect very much from her mother. Mrs. Fane was relieved to find that she was not hurt by Mrs. Palmer's departure; but this seemed to her, perhaps, saddest of all, and telling the saddest story. Her mother had sent Dolly baskets of flowers, Mrs. Morgan called constantly with

prescriptions of the greatest value. Mrs. Fane had more faith in her own beef-tea than in other people's prescriptions. She used to come in to see her patient several times a day. Sometimes she was on her way to the hospital in her long cloak and veiled bonnet. She would tell Dolly many stories of the poor people in their own homes. At certain hours of the day there would be voices and a trampling of feet on the stairs outside.

'It is some more of them nurses,' said Marker, peeping out cautiously. 'White caps and aprons—that's what this institootion seems to be kep' for.'

Marker had an objection to institootions. 'Let people keep themselves to theirselves,' she used to say. She could not bear to have Dolly ill in this strange house, with its silence and stiff orderly ways. She would gladly have carried her home if she could, but it was better for Dolly to be away from all the sad scenes of the last few months. Here she was resting with her grief—it seemed to lie still for a while. So the hours passed. She would listen with a vague curiosity to the murmur of voices, to the tramp of the feet outside; bells struck from the steeples round about, high in the air and melodiously ringing; Big Ben would come swelling over the house-tops: the river brought the sound to Dolly's open window.

Clouds are in the sky, a great heavy bank is rising westward. Yellow lights fall fitfully upon the water, upon the barges floating past, the steamers, the boats; the great spanning bridge and the distant towers are confused and softened by a silver autumnal haze; a few yellow leaves drop from the creeper round the window; the water flows cool and dim; the far distant sound of the wheels drones on continually. Dolly looks at it all. It does not seem to concern her, as she sits there sadly and wearily.

Who does not know these hours, tranquil but sad beyond words, when the pain not only of one's own grief, but of the sorrow of life itself, seems to enter into the soul. It was a pain new to Dolly, and it frightened her. Some one coming in saw Dolly's terrified look, and came and sat down beside her. It was Mrs. Fane, with her kind face, who took her hand, and seemed to know it all as she talked to her of her own life, talked to her of those whom she had loved and who were gone. Each word she spoke had a meaning, for she had lived her words and wept them out one by one.

She had seen it all go by. Love and friendship had passed her along the way; some had hurried on before, some had lagged behind, or strayed away from her grasp, and then late in life had come happiness, and to her warm heart tenderest dreams of motherhood, and then the final cry of parting love and of utter anguish and desolation, and that too had passed away. 'But the love is mine still,' she said, 'and love is life.'

To each one of us comes the thought of those who live most again, when we hear of a generous deed, of a truthful word spoken; of those who hated evil and loved the truth, for the truth was in them and common to all; of those whose eyes were wise to see the angels in the field at work among the devils. . . . . The blessing is ours of their love for great and noble things. We may not all be gifted with the divinest fires of their nobler insight and wider imagination, but we may learn to live as they did, and to seek a deeper grasp of life, a more generous sympathy. Overwhelmed we may be with self-tortures, and wants, and remorses, swayed by many winds, sometimes utterly indifferent from very weariness, but we may still return thanks for the steadfast power of the noble dead. It reigns unmoved through the raving of the storm; it speaks of a bond beyond death and beyond

life. Something of all this Mrs. Fane taught Dolly by words in this miserable hour of loneliness, but still more by her simple daily actions. . . . The girl, hearing her friend speak, seemed no longer alone. She took Mrs. Fane's hand and looked at her, and asked whether she might not come and live there some day, and try to help her with her sick people.

'Did I ever tell you that, long ago, Colonel Fane told me I was to come?' said Dolly, smiling.

'You shall come whenever you like,' said Mrs. Fane, smiling, 'but you will have other things to do, my dear, and you must ask your cousin's leave.'

'Robert! I don't think he would approve,' said Dolly, looking at a letter which had come from him only that morning. 'There are many things, I fear. . .' She stopped short and blushed painfully as one of the nurses came to the door. Only that day Dolly had done something of which she feared he might disapprove. She had written to Mr. Tapeall, in reply to a letter from him, and asked him to lose no time in acting upon George's will. She had a feverish longing that what he had wished should be done without delay.

There is a big van at the door of the house in Old Street: great packing-cases have been hoisted in; a few disconsolate chairs and tables are standing on the pavement; the one looking-glass of the establishment comes out sideways, and stuffed with straw; the creepers hang for sole curtains to the windows; George's plants are growing already into tangle in the garden; John's study is no longer crammed with reports,—the very flavour of his tobacco-smoke in it is gone, and the wind comes blowing freshly through the open window. Cassie and Zoe are away in the country on a visit; the boys are away; Rhoda and Mrs. Morgan are going back to join John in the City. The expense of the double

household is more than the family purse can conveniently meet. The gifts the rector has to bestow are not those of gold or of silver.

They have been working hard all the morning, packing, directing: Rhoda showing great cleverness and aptitude, for she was always good at an emergency; and now, tired out, with dusty hands and soiled apron, she is resting on the one chair which remained in the drawing-room, while Mrs. Morgan, downstairs, is giving some last directions. Rhoda is glad to go; to leave the old tiresome house; and yet, as she told Dolly, it is but the old grind over again, which is to recommence, and she hates it more and more. Vague schemes cross her mind—vague and indirect regrets. Is she sorry for George? Yes, Rhoda is as sorry as it is in her nature to be. She put on a black dress when she heard he was dead; but again and again the thought came to her how different things might have been. If she had only known all, thought Rhoda, naïvely, how differently she would have acted. As they sat in the empty room, where they used to make music once, she thought it all over. How dull they had all been! She felt ill and aggrieved. There was Raban, who never came near her now. It was all a mistake from the beginning. . . . Then she began to think about her future. She had heard of a situation in Yorkshire—Mrs. Boswarrick wanted a governess for her children. Should she offer herself? Was it near Ravensrick she wondered? This was not the moment for such reflections. One of the men came for the chair on which she was sitting. Rhoda then went into the garden, and looked about for the last time, walking once more round the old gravel-walk. George's strawberry-plants had spread all over the bed; the verbena was green and sprouting; the vine-wall was draped with falling sprays and tendrils. She pulled a great bunch down and came away, tearing the leaves one by one from

r. Tapeall was a very stupid old man, weaving his red into ungracious loops and meshes, acting with due eration. If an address was to be found in the Red , he would send a clerk to certify it before despatching 'ter by post. When Dolly some time before had sent George's will, he put it carefully away in his strong ; now when she wrote him a note begging him to do at e what was necessary, he deliberated greatly, and deter- ned to write letters to the whole family on the subject.

Mrs. Palmer replied by return of post. She was not a tle indignant when the old lawyer had announced to her at he could not answer for the turn which circumstances ight take, nor for the result of an appeal to the law. He as bound to observe that George's will was perfectly valid. consisted of a simple gift, in formal language, of all his roperty, real and personal, to Rhoda. By the late 'Wills ct' of 1837, this gift would pass all the property as it tood at his death; or, as Mr. Tapeall clearly expressed it, would speak as from his death as to the property comprised therein.' Mr. Tapeall recommended that his clients should do nothing for the present. The onus of proof lay with the opposite side. Mr. Raban had promised to ascertain all particulars, as far as might be: on his return from the Crimea they would be in a better position to judge.

Mrs. Palmer wrote back furious. Mr. Tapeall had reasons of his own. He knew perfectly well that it was a robbery, that every one would agree in this. It was a plot, she would not say by whom concocted. She was so immoderate in her abuse that Mr. Tapeall was seriously offended. Mrs. Palmer must do him the justice to withdraw her most uncalled-for [illegible] Miss Vanborough herself had requested him to pro[illegible]her's will and carry out his intentions as [illegible]perty. He considered it his duty to acquaint [illegible] the present state of affairs. Mr. Tapeall

happened to catch cold and to be confined to his room for some days. He had a younger partner, Mr. Parch, a man of a more energetic and fiery temperament, and when, in Mr. Tapeall's absence, a letter arrived signed Philippa Palmer, presenting her compliments, desiring them *at once* to destroy that will of her son's, to which, for their own purposes, no doubt, they were pretending to attach importance, Mr. Parch, irritated and indignant, sat down then and there and wrote off to Mrs. Palmer and to Miss Rhoda Parnell by that same post.

The letter to Mrs. Palmer was short and to the purpose. She was at liberty to consult any other member of the profession in whom she placed more confidence. To Miss Parnell, Mr. Parch related the contents of his late client's will.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

AN EXPLANATION.

'Oh! purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, and false for true.
Here, thro' the feeble twilight of this world,
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
That other, where we see as we are seen.'

—ALFRED TENNYSON.

LADY SARAH had left much more than anybody expected. She had invested her savings in houses. Some had sold lately at very high prices. A builder had offered a large sum for Church House itself and the garden. It was, as Mr. Tapeall said: the chief difficulty lay in the proof of George's death. Alas for human nature! after an enterprising visit from Rhoda to Gray's Inn (she had been there before with Mrs. Palmer), after a not very long interview, in which Rhoda opened her heart and her beautiful eyes, and in the usual formula expressed her helpless confidence in Mr. Tapeall's manly protection, the old lawyer was suddenly far more convinced than he had been before of the justice of Miss Parnell's claims. Her friend and benefactor had died on the 21st. He was Lady Sarah's heir, he had *wished* her to have this last token of his love, but she would give everything up, she said, rather than go to law with those whom she must ever revere, as belonging to him.

Mr. Tapeall was very much touched by her generosity.

'Really, you young ladies are outvieing each other,' said he. 'When you know a little more of the world and money's use——'

Rhoda started to go.

'I must not stay now; but then I shall trust to you *entirely*, Mr. Tapeall,' she said. 'You will always tell me what to do? Promise me that you will.'

'Perhaps, under the circumstances,' said Mr. Tapeall, hesitating, 'it might be better if you were to take some other opinion.'

'No, no,' said the girl, 'there is no division between us. All I wish is to do what is *right*, and to carry out dear George's wishes.'

It is not the place here to enter into details which Mr. Tapeall alone could properly explain. It was after an interview with him that Dolly wrote to Rhoda:—'Mr. Tapeall tells me of your generous offer, dear Rhoda, and that you are ready to give everything up sooner than go to law. Do not think that I am not glad that you should have what would have been yours if you had married my brother. I must always wish what he wished, and I write this to tell you that you must not think of me: my best happiness now is doing what he would have liked.'

To Dolly it seemed, in her present morbid and overwrought state, as if this was a sort of expiation for her hardness to Rhoda, whom George had loved, and indeed money seemed to her at that time but a very small thing, and the thought of Church House so sad that she could never wish to go back to it. And Robert's letters seemed to grow colder and colder, and everything was sad together.

Frank came to see her one day before she left London; he had been and come back, and was going again with fresh supplies to the East; he brought her a handful of dried grass

from the slope where George had fallen. Corporal Smith had shown him the place where he had found the poor young fellow lying. Frank had also seen Colonel Fane, who had made all inquiries at the time. The date of the boy's death seemed established without doubt.

When Frank said something of business, and of disputing the will, Dolly said,—'Please, please let it be. There seems to be only one pain left for me now—that of not doing as he wished.' People blamed Raban very much afterwards for having so easily agreed to give up Miss Vanborough's rights.

The storm of indignation, consternation, is over. The shower of lawyers' letters is dribbling and dropping more slowly. Mrs. Palmer had done all in her power, sat up all night, retired for several days to bed, risen by daybreak, gone on her knees to Sir Thomas, apostrophised Julie, written letter after letter, and finally come up to town, leaving Dolly at Henley Court. Dolly was in disgrace, direst disgrace. It was all her fault, her strange and perverted obstinacy, that led her to prefer others to her own mother. The Admiral, too, how glad he would have been of a home in London. How explain her own child's conduct? Dear George had never for one instant intended to leave anything but his own fortune to Rhoda. How could Dolly deny this? How could she? Poor Dolly never attempted to deny it. Sir Thomas had tried in vain to explain to his sister that Dolly had nothing whatever to do with the present state of the law. It was true that she steadily refused to put the whole thing into Chancery, as many people suggested; but Rhoda, too, refused to plead, and steadily kept to her resolution of opposing everything first.

'Painful, indeed, very painful,' said Mr. Stock, 'but absolutely necessary under the circumstances; otherwise I should say' (with a glance at poor pale Dolly), 'let it go, let it go, worm and moth, dross, dross, dross.'

'Mr. Stock, you are talking nonsense,' said Mrs. Palmer, quite testily.

Then Mrs. Palmer came to London with Sir Thomas, and all day long the faded fly—it has already appeared in these pages—travelled from Gray's Inn to Lincoln's Inn, to the Temple, and back to Mr. Tapeall's again. Mrs. Palmer lef at card at the Lord Chancellor's private residence, then picked up her brother at his Club, went off to the City to meet Rhoda face to face, and to insist upon her giving up her ill-gotten wealth. She might have spared herself the journey. Rhoda had left the Rectory. John Morgan received Mrs. Palmer and her companion with a very grave face. Cassie and Zoe left the room. Mrs. Morgan came down in an old cap looking quite crushed and subdued. The poor old lady began to cry.

John was greatly troubled: he said, 'I don't know how to speak of this wretched business. What can you think of us, Mrs. Palmer?'

'You had better not ask me, Mr. Morgan,' said Mrs. Palmer. 'I have come to speak to your niece.'

'I am sorry to say that Rhoda has left our house,' John said; 'she no longer cares for our opinion: she has sent for one of her own father's relations.'

'Perhaps you can tell me where to find her?' said Mrs. Palmer, in her most sarcastic tone. She thought Rhoda was upstairs and ashamed to come down.

'Oh! Mrs. Palmer, she is at Church House,' burst in Mrs. Morgan; 'we entreated her not to go. John forbade her. Mr. Tapeall gave her leave. If only Frank Raban were back

Mrs. Palmer gave a little shriek. 'At Church House already! It is disgraceful, utterly disgraceful, *that* is what I think. Dolly and all of you are behaving in the most scandalous ——'

'Poor Dolly has done no harm,' said Morgan, turning

very red. 'She has not unjustly and ungratefully grasped at a quibble, taken what does not belong to her, paid back all your kindness with ingratitude . . .'

Good-natured Sir Thomas was touched by the curate's earnestness. He held out his hand.

'You, of course, Morgan, have nothing to do with the circumstances,' said he. 'Something must be done; some arrangement must be made. Anything is better than going to law.'

'If Mrs. Palmer would only see her,' said Mrs. Morgan, earnestly. 'I know Rhoda would think it most kind.'

'I refuse to see Miss Parnell,' said Mrs. Palmer, with dignity. 'As for Tapeall, Thomas, let us go to him.'

'They certainly do not seem to have profited by Rhoda's increase of fortune, living on in that horrible dingy place,' Sir Thomas said, as the fly rolled away towards Gray's Inn once more. On the road Mrs. Palmer suddenly changed her mind, and desired the coachman to drive to Kensington.

'Do you really propose to go there?' said Sir Thomas, rather doubtfully.

'You are like the Admiral, Thomas, for making difficulties,' said Mrs. Palmer, excitedly, and calling to the coachman to go quicker.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached the door of Church House. A strange servant opens to them; a strange stream of light comes from the hall, where a bright chandelier had been suspended. The whole place seemed different already. A broad crimson carpet had been put down; some flowers had been brought in and set out on great china jars. Mrs. Palmer was rather taken aback as she asked, with her head far out of the carriage-window, whether Miss Parnell was at home.

The drawing-room door opens a little bit, Rhoda listens, hesitates whether or not to go out, but Mrs. Palmer is

coming in, and Rhoda retreats, only to give herself room to advance once more as the two visitors are ushered in. The girl comes flying from the other end of the room, bursts out crying, and clings kneeling to Philippa's dress.

'At last,' she says. 'Oh, Mrs. Palmer, I did not dare to hope, but oh! how good of you to come!'

'Good, indeed! No, do not thank *me*,' said Mrs. Palmer, drawing herself up. 'Have you the face, Rhoda, to meet me—to wish to see me after all the harm you have done to me and to my poor child? I wonder you dare stay in the same room with me!'

Rhoda did not remark that it was Mrs. Palmer herself who had come to her. Her eyes filled with big tears.

'What have I done?' she said, appealing to Sir Thomas. 'It is all theirs, and they know it. It will *always* be theirs. Oh, Mrs. Palmer, if you would only take it all, and let me be your—your little companion, as before!' cried the girl, with a sob, fixing those wonderful constraining eyes of hers upon Philippa. 'Will you send me away—I, who owe everything to you?' she said. And she clasped her hands and almost knelt. The baronet instinctively stepped forward to raise her.

'Do not kneel, Rhoda. This is all pretence,' cried Mrs. Palmer. 'Sir Thomas is easily deceived. If the Admiral were here he would see through your—your ungrateful duplicity.' Rhoda only persisted. How her eyes spoke! how her hands and voice entreated!

'You would believe me,' she said, 'indeed, you would, if you could see my heart. My only thought is to do as you wish, and to show you that I am not ungrateful.'

'Then you will give it all back,' said Mrs. Palmer, coming to the point instantly, and seizing Rhoda's hand tight in hers.

'Of course I will,' said Rhoda, still looking into Mrs

Palmer's eager face. 'I have done so already. It is all yours; it always will be yours, as before. Dear Mrs. Palmer, this is your house; your room is ready: I have put some flowers there. It is, oh, so sad here all alone! the walls seem to call for you! If you send me away I don't know what will happen to me!' and she began to cry. 'My own have sent me away; there is no one left but you, and the memory of his love for me.'

I don't know how or where Rhoda had studied human nature, nor how she had learnt the art of suiting herself to others. Mrs. Palmer came in meaning to speak her mind plainly, to overwhelm the girl with reproach; before she had been in the room two minutes she had begun to soften. There was the entreating Rhoda: no longer shabby little Rhoda from the curate's house, but an elegant lady in a beautiful simple dress, falling in silken folds; her cloud of dark hair was fashionably frizzed; her manner had changed—it was appealing and yet dignified, as befitted an heiress. All this was not without its effect upon Philippa's experienced eye.

Rhoda had determined from the first to win Mrs. Palmer over, to show the world that hers was no stolen wealth, on false position. She felt as if it would make everything comfortable both to her own conscience, which was not over easy, and to those from whom she was taking her wealth, if only a reconciliation could be brought about; what need was there for a quarrel—for going to law, if only all could be reconciled. She would do anything they wished—serve them in a hundred ways. Uncle John, who had spoken so unkindly, would see then who was right; Aunt Morgan, too, who had refused to come with her, would discover her mistake. There was a certain triumph in the thought of gaining over those who had most right to be estranged, so

thought Rhoda, unconsciously speculating upon Dolly's generosity, upon Mrs. Palmer's suddenness of character.

'This is all *most* painful to me,' Philippa cried, more and more flurried. 'Rhoda, you cannot expect ——'

'I expect nothing—nothing, only I ask *everything*,' said Rhoda, passionately, to Sir Thomas. 'Oh, Mrs. Palmer, you can send me away from you, if you will; or you can let me be your daughter. I would give up everything; I would follow you anywhere—anywhere—everywhere!'

Mrs. Palmer sank, still agitated, into the nearest arm-chair. It was a new one of Gillow's, with shining new cushions and castors. Rhoda came and knelt beside it, with her lustrous eyes still fixed upon Mrs. Palmer's face. Sir Thomas cleared his throat; he was quite affected by the little scene. Mrs. Palmer actually kissed Rhoda at parting.

CHAPTER XLIX.

SHEEP-SHEARING.

Ba, Ba, black sheep,
Have you any wool?
Yes, Master, that I have,—
Three bags full.

Lady Henley had always piqued herself upon a certain superiority to emotion of every kind,—youth, love, sorrow had seemed to her ridiculous things for many years. This winter, however, had changed the little wooden woman and brought her grief and anxiety, and revealed secrets to her that she had never guessed before. Often the very commonest facts of life are not facts, only sounds, until they have been lived. One can't listen to happiness, or love, or sorrow—one must have been some things in order to understand others. Lady Henley married somewhat late in life—soberly, without romance. Until then, her horse, her dog, her partner at the last ball, had been objects of about equal interest. She had always scouted all expressions of feeling. She had but little experience; and coldness of heart comes more often from ignorance than from want of kindness or will to sympathise.

Sometimes the fire of adversity warms a cold heart, and then the story is not all sorrowful. The saddest story is that of some ice-bound souls, whom the very fires of adversity cannot reach. Poor Dolly sometimes felt the chill when Philippa, unconscious of the stab, would say something, do

some little thing, that brought a flush of pain into her daughter's cheek.

The girl would not own it to herself, but there is a whole life reluctant as well as a life consenting. The involuntary words, the thoughts we would not think, the things we would not do, and those that we do not love, are among the strongest influences of our lives. Dolly at this time found herself thinking many things she would gladly have left unthought, hoping things sometimes that she hated herself for hoping, indifferent to others that all those round about her seemed to imagine of most consequence, and that she tried in vain to care for too. When Philippa began to recover from her first burst of hysteric grief, her spirits seemed to revive. They were enough to overwhelm Dolly at times, for she had inherited her mother's impressionability, and at the same time her father's somewhat morbid fidelity.

Lady Henley's dislike to her sister-in-law made her clear-sighted as to what was going on, and she tried in many ways to shield the girl from her mother's displeasure and incessant worry of recrimination. With a view to Jonah's possible interest, she had regretted Dolly's decision not to dispute the will as much as Mrs. Palmer herself, but she could not see her worried.

'Philippa is really too bad,' she said one day. 'Thomas, can't you do something—send for some one—suggest something?'

Sir Thomas meekly suggested Robert Henley.

'The very last person I should wish to see,' cried Lady Henley, sharply. 'Bell, did you ever know your father understand anything one said to him?'

Lady Henley's concern was relieved without Sir Thomas's assistance. Before the end of the winter Mrs. Palmer had left Henley Court and firmly established herself at Paris. Dolly remained behind. It was Philippa's arrangement, and

Dolly had been glad to agree to her cousins' eager proposal that she should stay on at Henley for a time. Nobody quite knew how it had happened, except, indeed, that Philippa had intended it all along; and she now wrote in raptures with the climate, so different from what they had been enduring in Yorkshire. But Joanna did not care for climate —her Palmer constitution was not susceptible to the influence of atmosphere.

All through that sad winter Dolly stayed on in Yorkshire. Their kindness was unwearied. Then, when the snow began to melt at last, the heavy clouds of winter to lighten, when the spring began to dawn, and the summer sun and the sweet tones of natural things to thrill and stir the world to life, Dolly, too, began to breathe again; she could not enjoy all this beauty, but it comforted her, nevertheless.

The silence of the country was very tranquillising and quieting. She had come like a tired child, sad and overwearied. Mother Nature was hushing her off to sleep at last. She spent long mornings in the meadows down by the river; sometimes her cousins took her for walks across the moors, but to Dolly they seemed more like birds than human beings, and she had not strength for their ten-mile flights.

'You know what our life is,' she wrote to Robert, 'and I need not describe it. I try to help my uncle a little of a morning. I go out driving with my aunt, or into the village of an afternoon with Norah; the wind comes cutting through the trees by the lodge-gate—all the roads are heavy with snow. Everything seems very cold and sad—everything except their kindness, which I shall never forget. Yesterday Aunt Joanna kissed me, and looked at me so kindly that I found myself crying suddenly. Dear Robert, she showed me the letter you wrote her. I cannot help saying one word

about that one word in it in which you speak of your doubting that I wish for your return. Why do you say such things or think such unjust thoughts of me? Your return is the one bright spot in my life just now. Did I not tell you so when you went away? If I have ever failed, ever loved you less than you wished, scold me, dear Robert, as I am scolding you now, and I will love you the more for it. You and I can understand, but it is hard to explain, even to my aunt, how things stand between us. I trust you utterly, and I am quite content to leave my fate to you.'

She sat writing by the fire on her knee as she warmed herself by the embers. She paused once or twice and looked into the flame with her sweet dreamy eyes. Where do people travel to as they sit quietly dreaming and warming their feet at the fire? What long, aimless journeys into other countries, into other hearts! What strange starts and returns! Dolly finds herself by the little well in Kensington Gardens, and some one is there, who says things in a strange voice that thrills as Robert's never did. Does he call her his Rachel? Is love a chord? It had seemed to her one single note until Frank Raban had spoken. Is this Robert who is saying that she is the one only woman in all the world for him? Dolly blushes a burning blush of shame all alone as she sits in the twilight when she discovers of what she had been thinking.

'What are you burning, Dolly?' said her aunt, coming in.

It was her letter that Dolly had thrown into the fire. It had seemed to her false somehow, and yet she wrote another to the same effect next day.

Mr. Anley was going to Paris, and Dolly was to go with him. On the last day before she left her uncle took her for a drive. He had business beyond Pebblesthwaite, and while he went into a house Dolly wandered on through an open gate, and by a little path that led across a field to a stream

and a great bleating and barking and rushing of waters. It was early spring. As she came round by the bridge she saw a penned crowd of sheep, a stout farmer in gaiters was flinging them one by one into the river, they splashed and struggled in vain ; a man stood up to his waist in the midst of the stream dowsing the poor gentle creatures one by one, as they swam past. The stream dashed along the narrow gully. The dogs were barking in great excitement. The sheep went in black and came out white and fleecy and flurried, scrambling to land. Young Farmer Rhodes stood watching the process mounted on his beautiful mare ; James Brand, with the lurcher in a leash, had also stopped for a moment. He looked up with his kind blue eyes at Dolly as she crossed the bridge, and stood watching the rural scene. The hedges and the river banks were quivering with coming spring, purple buds and green leaves, and life suddenly rising out of silent moors. James Brand came up to where Dolly was standing. He stood silent for an instant, then he spoke in his soft Yorkshire tones :

'T' ship doan't like it,' he said. 'T' water's cold and deep, poor things. 'Tis not t' ship aloan has to be dipped oft-times and washed in t' waters of affliction,' moralised James, who attended at the chapel sometimes.

Just then Sir Thomas came up. He knew James Brand and Farmer Tanner too ; he had come to buy some of these very sheep that were now struggling in the water ; and he turned and walked on with Tanner towards the little farm. Dolly would not go in, she preferred waiting outside. All the flowers were bursting into blaze again in the pretty garden. Geraniums coming out in the window, ribës and lilies, dandies, early pansies, forget-me-nots, bachelor's buttons, all the homely garland of cottage flowers was flung there. Beyond the walls were the chimneys of a house showing among the trees. Some men were working

[illegible] at the word in it in which you speak of your [illegible] that I wish for your return. Why do you say [illegible] such unjust thoughts of me? Your return [illegible] spot in my life just now. Did I not [illegible] you when you went away? If I have ever failed, [illegible] less than you wished, scold me, dear Robert, as I am [illegible] you now, and I will love you the more for it. [illegible] I can understand, but it is hard to explain, even [illegible] how things stand between us. I trust you utterly, and I am quite content to leave my fate to you.'

She sat writing by the fire on her knee as she warmed herself by the embers. She paused once or twice and looked into the flame with her sweet dreamy eyes. Where do people travel to as they sit quietly dreaming and warming their feet at the fire? What long, aimless journeys into other countries, into other hearts! What strange starts and returns! Dolly finds herself by the little well in Kensington Gardens, and some one is there, who says things in a strange voice that thrills as Robert's never did. Does he call her his Rachel? Is love a chord? It had seemed to her one single note until Frank Raban had spoken. Is this Robert who is saying that she is the one only woman in all the world for him? Dolly blushes a burning blush of shame all alone as she sits in the twilight when she discovers of what she had been thinking.

'What are you burning, Dolly?' said her aunt, coming in.

It was her letter that Dolly had thrown into the fire. It had seemed to her false somehow, and yet she wrote another to the same effect next day.

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and a great bleating and barking and rushing of waters. It was early spring. As she came round by the bridge she saw a penned crowd of sheep, a stout farmer in gaiters was flinging them one by one into the river, they splashed and struggled in vain; a man stood up to his waist in the midst of the stream dowsing the poor gentle creatures one by one as they swam past. The stream dashed along the narrow gully. The dogs were barking in great excitement. The sheep went in black and came out white and fleecy and flurried, scrambling to land. Young Farmer Rhodes stood watching the process mounted on his beautiful mare; James Brand, with the lurcher in a leash, had also stopped for a moment. He looked up with his kind blue eyes at Dolly as she crossed the bridge, and stood watching the rural scene. The hedges and the river banks were quivering with coming spring, purple buds and green leaves, and life suddenly rising out of silent moors. James Brand came up to where Dolly was standing. He stood silent for an instant, then he spoke in his soft Yorkshire tones:

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and chopping wood. The red leaves of last winter's frost still hung to the branches. Brand was coming and going with his dog at his heels, and he stopped again, seeing Dolly standing alone; she had some curious interest for him. She had rallied that day from a long season of silent depression. The spring birds seemed to be singing to her, the grass seemed to spread green and soft for her feet, the incense to be scenting the high air; it was a sweet and fresh and voiceful stillness coming after noise and sorrow and confusion of heart. The farmer's garden was half flower, half kitchen garden; against one wall, rainbowed with moss and weather stains, clustered the blossom of a great crop of future autumn fruits; the cabbages stood in rows marshalled and glistening too. The moors were also shining, and the birds whistling in the air.

'Dolly,' said Sir Thomas, coming out fussily, 'I find Raban is expected immediately. I will go up to the house and leave a note for him. I thought you had been here before,' said Sir Thomas, as Dolly opened her eyes. This then was Ravensrick.

The worthy baronet was not above a condescending gossip with James Brand, as they walked up to the house. The number of men employed, the cottages, the schoolmaster's increase of salary. 'Nice old place,' Sir Thomas said, looking round: then he went on—

'We must have a lady at Ravensrick some of these days.'

'Wall,' said old Brand, 'he were caught in t' net once, Sir Thomas; 'tis well nigh eno' to make a yong man wary. They laid their toils for others, as ye know, but others were sharper than he ——'

'Yes, yes; what a very pretty view,' said Sir Thomas, hastily pointing to a moor upon which a great boulder of rock was lying.

'That is t' crag,' said Brand; 'there's a watter-fo' beyond. I ca' that ro-mantic; Mr. Frank were nigh killed as a boy fallin' fra t' side. . . . . I have known him boy and man,' the old fellow went on, with unusual expansion, striking his gun against a felled tree; 'none could be more fair and honourable than my ma-aster; people slandered him and lied to t' Squire, but Mr. Fra-ank scorned to take mean adva-antage o' silly women, and they made prey of him. . . . .' They had reached the garden by this time, where old Mrs. Raban used to take her daily yards of walking exercise, and where the old Squire used to sun himself hour after hour.

The ragged green leaves of the young chestnuts were coming out, and the red blossoms of the sycamore, and the valley was full of light and blending green. But the house looked dark and closed, only one window was open. It was the library window, and Sir Thomas walked in to write his note. And Dolly followed, looking round and about; she thought to herself that she was glad to have come—glad to have heard the old keeper's kindly praise of his young master. Frank must be her friend always, even though she never saw him again. The manner of his life and the place of it could never be indifferent to her. But she must never see him again, never think of him, if she could help it.

The door opened suddenly, and Dolly started from the place where she had been standing; it was only Becky of the beacon head, who had come in to ask if anything was wanted.

'We must be off,' said Sir Thomas; 'my compliments to Mr. Raban and this note. Tell him we hope to see him as soon as he can conveniently come over. Your poor Aunt is very anxious always,' he said to Dolly in an explanatory voice, and then he stepped out through the window again, where Brand was still waiting.

Dolly looked back once as she left the room. 'Good-by,' she said in her most secret heart. 'Good-by, forgive me if I have ever wronged you.' As she went out, her dress caught in the window, and with an impatient, hurried movement she stooped and disentangled it.

As they were driving off again, Sir Thomas complacently announced that the works at Medmere were certainly a failure. 'One would not think so from his manner; but Raban is a most incautious man,' said he; 'we must come again when you come back to us, Dolly. Perhaps a certain traveller will be home by then,' he added, good-naturedly.

'I shall be gone before Mr. Raban comes back,' said Dolly.

'Robert—Robert. I was speaking of Robert, of course,' said Sir Thomas, pulling at the reins.

Dolly blushed crimson as she stooped to look for a glove that she had dropped. That night again she awoke suddenly in a strange agony of shame for her involuntary slip. It seemed to reveal her own secret heart, from which she fain would fly; she had promised to be true, and she was not false, but was this being true?

What is it that belongs to a woman of a right, inalienably, as to a man probity, or a high-minded sense of honour—is it for women, womanliness and the secret rectitude of self-respect? My poor Dolly felt suddenly as if even this last anchor had failed, and for a cruel dark hour she lay sobbing on her pillow. Then in the dawn she fell asleep.

CHAPTER L.

TEMPERED WINDS.

Oh, all comforters,
All soothing things that bring mild ecstasy,
Came with her coming.

—G. Eliot.

Frank Raban arrived that evening. The fires were burning a cheerful greeting; the table was laid in the library; his one plate, his one knife and fork, were ready. After all, it was home, though there was no one to greet him except the two grinning maidens. The dogs were both up at the lodge. As Frank was sitting down to dinner he saw something black lying in one of the windows. He picked it up. It was a glove. Becky roared with laughter when Frank asked her if it was hers; she was setting down a huge dish with her honest red hands. *Her* gloves! 'They were made o' cotton,' she said; 'blue, wi' red stitchens'.' She suggested that 'this might be t' young lady's; t' gentleman and t' young lady had come and had walked about t' house wi' James Brand.'

'What gentleman?—what young lady?' asked Raban.

'A pale-faced young lady in bla-ack cloathes,' said Becky. 'T' gentleman were called Sir Tummas. James Brand, he knawed.'

'Sir Thomas! A pale young lady in black!'

Frank stuck the little glove up on the tall chimney. It seemed a welcoming hand put out to greet him on his

return. He had guessed to whom the glove belonged even before he saw a little inky D marked in the wrist.

'So she had been there!' While he had been away life in its fiercest phases had met him, and at such times people's own feelings and histories seem to lose in meaning, in vividness, and importance. When whole nations are concerned, and the life of thousands is the stake by which the game is played; then each private story seems lost, for a time, in the great rush of fate. Frank had been twice to the East during that winter. He had seen Jonah, he had disposed of his stores. The little yacht had done her work bravely, and was now cruising in summer seas, and Raban had come home to his sheep and his furrows—to his old furrows of thought; how curiously the sight of that little glove brought it all back once more.

As Frank rode along the lanes, it was difficult to believe that all was tranquil as it seemed. That no ambush was lurking behind the hedges; that the rumble of carts travelling along with their load from the quarry was no echo of distant guns; that no secret danger was to be dreaded. This was the second morning after his arrival. The sunshine which Dolly had liked seemed to him also of good omen. The lilacs were coming into flower, the banks were sparkling with flowers: primroses and early hyacinths, summer green and summer light were brightening along the road. Frank rode quietly along on his way to the Court, sure of a welcome from Lady Henley, for had he not seen Jonah? Bloom, little flowers, along the path; sing, little birds, from overarching boughs; beat, honest heart, along the road that leads to the goal of thy life's journey!

Lady Henley was the first person he saw when he rode into the park. Sunshiny though it was, she was tucked up in some warm furs and sitting on the lawn in front of the house.

'How do you do?' said Lady Henley. 'My husband told me you were expected back. I hoped you might come. Well, have you brought me any news?'

When Lady Henley heard that Jonah was looking well, that Frank had seen him ten days before, had dined with him in his hut, she could not make enough of the messenger of good tidings. He must stay to luncheon; he must come to dinner: he must see the girls. The luncheon bell rang double-loud in Frank's honour, and Frank was ushered in; Norah and Bell bounced in almost immediately; an extra plate was set for Frank. The butler appeared and the page with some smoking dishes on a tray. That was all. Frank looked up in vain, hoping to see the door open once more.

'I am so sorry Sir Thomas is gone up to town with Mr. Anley,' said Lady Henley. 'It is some tiresome business of my sister-in-law's. My niece started with them this morning. We have had her all the winter, poor thing. It is really most provoking about the property, and how Philippa can have made it up with that Parnell girl I cannot imagine. They are inseparable, I hear. Just like Philippa. Dolly is going on to Paris immediately with the Squire to join her mother—quite unnecessary. Have you heard that Robert Henley is expected back? It seems to me every one is gone mad,' said Lady Henley. 'He has only been out six months. . . .'

Frank asked how Miss Vanborough was looking.

Bell immediately volunteered a most dismal account.

'I am sure Dolly will go into a decline if some one does not cheer her up. Norah and I have done our best. We wanted to take her to the York ball, and we wanted to take her to Lynn Gill, and across the moor to Keithburn, and we tried to get her to come out huntin' one day. What she wants is stirring up, and so I told papa; and, for my part, I'm not at all sorry Robert is to come home,' says Bell.

Mamma was evidently very much annoyed.

'What is the use talking nonsense, Bell? Robert would have done much better if he had stayed where he was, and Dolly too,' said Lady Henley. 'Everybody seems to have lost their head. Here is a letter from the Admiral. He is in town, on his way to America. He wants to meet Dolly: he will just miss her. As for Hawtry, I think he is possessed. Not that I am at all surprised, poor fellow,' said Lady Henley, expressively. 'We know what he finds at home . . .'

Frank went back very much dispirited after his luncheon. It was later in the day, and the flowers and the sunshine seemed to have lost their brightness; but when he got home the little glove was still on the chimney-piece, with limp fingers extended.

The Hôtel Molleville stands in one of the back streets near the English Embassy at Paris. One or two silent streets run out of the Faubourg St. Honoré, and cross and recross each other in a sort of minuet, with a certain stately propriety that belongs to tall houses, to closed gates, enclosed courtyards, and high roofs. There is a certain false air of the Faubourg St. Germain about this special quarter. Some of the houses appear to have drifted over by mistake to the wrong side of the Seine. They have seen many a dynasty go by, heard many a shriek of liberty; they stand a little on one side of the march of events, that seem to prefer the main thoroughfares.

The Hôtel Molleville is somewhat less stately than its companions. The gates are not quite so lofty; the windows have seen less of life, and have not been so often broken by eager patriotism. It belongs to a noble family that is somewhat come down in the world. The present marquis, a stout, good-humoured man, had been in the navy in his youth, and

there made friends with the excellent Admiral Pallmere, at whose suggestion he had consented to let a little apartment on the first floor to his lady, who had elected to reside in Paris during her husband's absence.

Paris comes with a cheerful flash of light, a sudden multitudinous chorus. The paved streets rattle, the voices chatter, the note is not so deep as the hollow London echo that we all know, that slow chord of a great city.

Dolly and the Squire come driving along from the station with many jingles and jolts. Little carriages rattle past. It is evening playtime for those in the street. The shops are not yet closed; there is a lady sitting in every little brilliant shrine along the way. They drive on; they see long rivers of lamps twinkling into far vistas; they cross a great confluence of streams of light, of cries of people.

'Here we are at the Madeleine,' says Mr. Anley, looking out.

In another ten minutes they have driven on and reached the English Embassy. Then, with a sudden turn that sends old Marker with her parcels tumbling into Dolly's lap, they drive up a side street and stop at the door of the house where Mrs. Palmer is living.

'I shall call and see how you are in the morning,' says Mr. Anley, helping Dolly out. He would have accompanied her upstairs, but she begged him to go on.

The door of the house opens; Dolly and Marker come into a *porte-cochère* pervaded with a smell of dinner that issues from an open door that leads into a great lighted kitchen, where brazen covers and dials are shining upon the wall, where a dinner is being prepared, not without some excitement and clanking of saucepans. The cook comes to the door to see Dolly go by. A *concierge* comes forward, and Dolly runs up the polished stairs. It all returns to her with strange vividness.

Dolly rang at the bell, and waited on the first landing, as she had been desired. A man in a striped waistcoat opened the door, and stared in some surprise at the young lady with her parcels and wraps, and at the worthy Marker, also laden with many bags, who stood behind her young mistress.

'Does Mrs. Palmer live here?' Dolly said, speaking English.

The man in stripes, for all answer, turned, drew a curtain that hid an inner hall, and stood back to let them pass. The hall was carpeted, curtained, lighted with hanging lamps. Dolly had not expected anything so luxurious. Her early recollections did not reach beyond the bare wooden floors and the china stoves in the old house in the Champs Elysées. She looked round wondering, and she was still more surprised when the servant flung open two folding-doors and signed to her to pass.

She entered, silently treading on the heavy carpet. The place was dim, warm with a fragrant perfume of flowers: a soft lamp-light was everywhere, a fragrant warmth. There was a sense of utter comfort and luxury: tall doors fast closed, draperies shining with dim gold gleams, pictures on the walls, couches, lace cushions; some tall glasses in beautiful old frames repeated it all—the dim light, the flowers' golden atmosphere. In the middle of the room a lamp hung over a flower-table, of which the tall pointed leaves were crimsoning in the soft light, the ferns glittering, a white camelia head opening to this alabaster moon.

The practical Dolly stopped short. There must be some mistake she thought. A lady in a white dress was standing by the chimney, leaning against the heavy velvet top; a gentleman also standing there was listening with bent head to something she was saying. The two were absorbed. They did not notice her, they were so taken up with one another.

Dolly had expected to find her mother and the Admiral. She had come to some wrong place. For an instant she vaguely thought of strangers. Then her heart gave a warning thump before she had put words to her thoughts. She was standing under the lamp by the great spiked leaves, and she suddenly caught hold of the marble table, for the room seemed to shake.

'Who is it, Casimir?' said the lady, impatiently, as the servant came up to her.

The tall gentleman also looked up.

Dolly's dazzled eyes were gazing at him in bewildered amazement. He had quickly stepped back when the man approached, and he now turned his full face and looked at Dolly, who could not speak. She could only stand silent, holding out her trembling hands, half happy, half incredulous. It was Robert—Robert, whom she had thought miles away—Robert, whose letter had come only the day before—Robert, who had been there with Rhoda, so absorbed that even now he scarcely seemed to recognise Dolly in her travel-worn black clothes, looking like a blot upon all this splendour.

This, then, was the moment for which she had waited, and thought to wait so long. He had come back to her.

'Robert!' she cried at last.

Perhaps if they had been alone, the course of their whole lives might have been changed; if their meeting had been unwitnessed, if Casimir had not been there, if Rhoda had not come up with many an exclamation of surprise, if all those looking-glasses and chairs and tables had not been in the way. . . . Robert stood looking down from the length of his six feet. He held a cold hand in his. He did not kiss Dolly, as he had done when he went away. He spoke to her, but with a slight constraint. He seemed to have lost his usual fluency and presence of mind. He was shocked at the

change he saw. Those few months had worn her radiant beauty. She was tired by the journey, changed in manner. All her sweet faith and readiness to believe, and all her belief in Henley, had not made this meeting, to which she had looked forward as 'her one bright spot,' anything like that which she had expected. Something in Robert's voice, his slight embarrassment, something in the attitude of the two as she had seen them when she first came in and thought them strangers, something indefinite, but very present, made her shy and strange, and the hand that held her cold fingers let go as Rhoda flung her arms affectionately round her. Then with gentle violence Dolly was led to the fire and pushed down into a satin chair.

'I only came last night,' said Henley. 'I was afraid of missing you, or I should have gone to meet you.'

'We expected you to-morrow, Dolly,' interrupted Rhoda, in her sweet voice: 'we were so surprised to see *him* walk in;' and she quietly indicated Henley with a little motion of the head.

'Everybody seems to have been running after everybody else. I am ashamed of myself for startling you all,' said Robert, jerking his watch-chain. 'It is a whole series of changes. I will tell you all about it, Dolly, when you are rested. I found I could get leave at the very last instant, and I came off by the steamer. I wrote from Marseilles, but you must have missed my letter. This is altogether a most fortunate, unexpected meeting,' he added, turning to Rhoda.

Henley's utter want of tact stood him in good service, and made it possible for him to go on talking. Dolly seemed frozen. Rhoda was very much agitated. There seemed to be a curious understanding and sympathy between Robert and Miss Parnell.

'Have you seen your mother?' said Rhoda, putting her

white hand upon Dolly's shoulder. 'How cold and tired you must be? Who did you come with, after all?'

'I came with—I forget,' said Dolly. 'Where is mamma?' and she started up, looking still bewildered.

'Your mother lives next door. I myself made the same mistake last night,' said Robert, and he picked up Dolly's bags and shawls from the floor, where she had dropped them. Rhoda started up to lead the way.

'You may as well come through my room,' she said, opening a door into a great dim room scented with verbena, and all shining with lace frills and satin folds. A middle-aged lady in a very smart cap, who was reading the paper by the light of a small lamp, looked up as they passed. Rhoda carelessly introduced her as Miss Rougemont.

'My companion,' she said, in a low voice, as she opened another door. 'She is very good-natured and is never put out by anything.'

Dolly followed straight on over the soft carpets, on through another dark room, and then another, to a door from whence came a gleam of light.

As Rhoda opened the door there came the sudden jingling of music and a sound of voices; a man met them carrying a tray of refreshments; a distant voice was singing to the accompaniment of a piano. Julie stood at a table pouring out coffee; she put down the pot with an exclamation: 'Good heavens, mademoiselle! Who ever would have thought——?' Some one came up to ask for coffee, and Julie took up her pot again.

'How stupid of me to forget!' said Rhoda. 'It is your mother's day at home, Dolly. I will send her to you. Wait one minute.'

Poor Dolly, it was a lesson to her not to come unexpectedly.

'Madame *will* be distressed,' said Julie, coming forward,

'to receive Mademoiselle in such a confusion! The gentlemen all came; they brought music; they want coffee at every instant, or *thé à l'Anglaise*.'

As she spoke a little fat man came up to the table, and Julie darted back to her post.

Meanwhile the music went on.

'Petits, petits, petits oiseaux!'

sang a tenor voice—

'Jolis, jolis, jolis, petits!'

sang a bass—

'Jolis, petits, chéris!'

sang the two together.

But at that instant, with a rush, with a flutter, with her hair dressed in some strange new style, Mrs. Palmer at last appeared and clasped Dolly, with many reproaches.

'You naughty child, who *ever* expected you to-day! and the Admiral started off to meet you! How provoking. A wreck! utterly tired out! Come to your room directly, dearest. It is quite ready, only full of cloaks and hats. Here, Rhoda, cannot you take her in?'

'Never mind the cloaks and hats, mamma,' said Dolly, with a smile. 'I had rather stay here; and Julie will give me and Marker some coffee.'

'Marker! Good gracious! I had forgotten all about Marker,' exclaimed Mrs. Palmer.

CHAPTER LI.

'SING HOARSE, WITH TEARS BETWEEN.'

'Sing sorrow, sing sorrow, triumph the good.'
—ÆSCHYLUS, *Agamemnon.*

ROBERT had come back from India prepared to fight Dolly's battle. Although expressing much annoyance that this disagreeable task should have been left to him, he remembered Rhoda as an inoffensive little thing, and he had no doubt but that she would hear reason, if things were clearly put before her. She was too much in her right to be expected to give up everything, but Robert had but little doubt that he should be able to effect a compromise; he had lived long enough to realise how much weight one definite, clearly-expressed opinion may have in the balance. It was most fortunate that his official duties should have brought him home at this juncture. Dolly must consent to be guided by him. He was in some sense her natural protector still, although he felt at times that there was not that singleness of purpose about his cousin which he should have wished to find in the woman whom he looked upon as his future wife. At this time he had no intention of breaking with her. He wished to keep her in suspense. She deserved it: she had not once thought of him; she had behaved most childishly—yielded where she should have been firm, sacrificed everything to a passing whim; she had been greatly tried, of course, but even all this might have been partly avoided if

she had done as he recommended. So thought Robert as he was tying his white neckcloth in the glass at his hotel. The gilt frame reflected back a serious young man and a neatly-tied cravat, and he was satisfied with both. He came back to a late dinner with Rhoda after Mrs. Palmer's Thursday Afternoon had departed, taking away its cloaks and hats. Signor Pappaforte was the last to go. M. de Molleville took leave. Mrs. Palmer, needless to say, was charmed with the Molleville family—counts, marquises, dukes. They all lived in the house, overhead, underfoot. Mdme. la Comtesse was a most delightful person. M. le Comte was the only one of the family she did not take to, M. le Comte being a sensible man, and somewhat abruptly cutting short Mrs. Palmer's many questions and confidences.

The table was prettily laid in the big dining-room; the lamp-light twinkled upon the firmament of plates and silver spoons, and the flowers that Rhoda had herself arranged. She was waiting for her guests. Robert having, as in duty bound, first rung at his aunt's door, and learned from Julie that Mademoiselle was resting, and that Madame was dressing still, came across to the other apartment, where all was in order and ready to make him comfortable. Rhoda was sitting in her usual place on the little low chair by the fire. She had taken off her white dress—she had put on a velvet gown; in her dark hair were two diamond stars: they shone in the fire-light as she sat thoughtfully watching the little flame. 'Have you brought them?' she said, without looking round. 'Are you alone? Come and sit down here and be warmed while you wait.'

Rhoda's voice was like a bell, it rang so clear; when she was excited it seemed to rise and fall and vibrate. At other times she would sit silent; but though she sat silent, she held her own. Some people have this gift of voiceless emotion, of silent expression. Rhoda was never unnoticed:

in her corner, crossing a street, or passing a stranger in a crowded room, she would mark her way as she passed along. It was this influence which had haunted poor George all his life, which made itself felt now as it had never done before. Rhoda now seemed suddenly to have bloomed into the sweetness and delicate brightness which belongs to some flowers, such as cyclamen and others I could name. She had been transplanted into clear air, into ease of mind and of body; she suddenly seemed to have expanded into her new life, and her nature had kindled to all sorts of new and wonderful things. Many of these were to be bought with silver and gold; it was not for affection, nor for the highest emotions, that little Rhoda had pined: hers was the enthusiasm of common-place: it was towards bright things of every kind that this little flame spirit turned so eagerly. Sometimes A gets credit for saying what B may have thought and felt, what C has lived for years with courage and self-denial; then comes a Rhoda, who *looks* it all without an effort or a single word, and no wonder that Robert and many others were struck by her strange beauty and touched by her gentle magnetism of expression and of grace.

Henley came up, and without any hesitation established himself in the warm corner she indicated. The stiffness he had undoubtedly felt when they first met had worn off since that 'business talk'—so Rhoda called it; and now he did not know whether it was business or pleasure as he listened to Rhoda's low song of explanation, and watched her white fingers opening to the fire. Signor Pappaforte's tenor was not to compare to Rhoda's soft performance. Perhaps I am wrong to use such a word; for, after all, she was as genuine as Dolly herself in her way—as Dolly who had fallen asleep, and was far away in spirit, dreaming a little dream of all that had happened that day.

Rhoda resumed their conversation quite naturally. 'We

may be interrupted,' she said earnestly, 'and there is one more thing I want to say to you. You know better than I do; you must judge for me. I always hoped that when you came, all would be arranged. I know nothing of business,' she said, smiling. 'I only know that I like my pretty things, and that it makes me happy to live here, and to have my flowers and my nice dresses and fresh air. Is it wrong? It seems a sort of new life to me;' and a wistful face was gently upraised. 'If Dolly wishes it I will give it all back—everything,' said Rhoda, who knew that she was pretty safe in making this generous offer, and she smoothed the soft velvet fold wistfully with her fingers, as if she felt it was no longer her own. 'Dolly refused, when I begged her to take it all long ago,' she added. 'Now I wish she had agreed before I became accustomed to this new life. I confess that I do not like to look back. Serge and smoke and omnibuses all seem more horrid than ever.'

Robert scarcely knew how to answer the poor little thing. 'Did you offer to give it all up?' he said, starting up, and walking up and down with long strides to hide his embarrassment. 'I was never told of it, or I should certainly have ac —— Dolly should have told me,' he said quickly—all his embarrassment turning into wrath against Dolly.

'Don't blame her,' said Rhoda, in a low voice; 'she is so generous, so noble. I can understand her refusing for herself; though I think if I had loved any one as—as Dolly must love—I should have thought of his interest first of all, and not of my own impulse. I know people might say it is very foolish of me and weak-minded,' she said, faltering.

'They could only say that *you* were a true woman, and respect you for your generous devotion,' said Robert, taking her hand. He dropped it rather awkwardly as Miss Rougemont came into the room, followed almost immediately by Mrs. Palmer.

'That tired child of mine is still asleep,' said Mrs. Palmer. 'Marker wouldn't let me awaken her.'

'Then perhaps we had better not wait,' said Rhoda, whose dark eyes were never more wakeful. 'Ring the bell, Miss Rougemont.'

So Rhoda and her guests sat down with a very good appetite to dinner; she charmed them all by her grace as a hostess. Miss Rougemont, who was not a guest, discreetly retired as soon as the meal was over.

Robert passed a very disturbed night. It was near twelve o'clock next morning when he rang at the door of his aunt's apartment. Dolly had been expecting him for a long time. The baker, the water-carrier with his clanking wooden pails, Mr. Anley's familiar tones, inquiring whether Miss Vanborough was '*engagée*'—every ring, every voice had made her heart beat. Robert found Mr. Anley still sitting with Dolly. They were by an open window full of spring flowers. The cheerful rattle of the street below, the cries of itinerant vendors, the noisy song of a bird in the sunshine, and the bright morning light itself poured into the room in a great stream of dazzling motes and gold, through which the girl came blushing to meet her kinsman.

'I am afraid your long sleep has not rested you,' he said, looking at her hard, as she stood in the slanting stream, all illuminated for an instant—her rough hair radiant, her black gown changed to a purple primrose mist; then she came out of the light into every day, and again he thought how changed she was.

'I have brought you some violets,' and he gave her a bunch that he held in his hand. Robert thought Dolly changed. How shall I describe her at this time of her life? The dominant radiance of early youth was gone; a whole lifetime had come into the last few months. But if the brightest radiance was no longer there, a less self-absorbed

person than Robert Henley might have been touched by the tender sweetness of that pale face. Its peaceful serenity did not affect him in the same way as Rhoda's appealing glances; it seemed to tell of a whole experience far away, in which he was not, and which, in his present frame of mind, only seemed to reproach him.

Dorothea had no thought of reproach. She was a generous girl, unselfish, able to forgive, as it is not given to many to forgive. She might remember, but malice was not in her. Malice and uncharitableness as often consist in the vivid remembrance of the pang inflicted, as in that of the blow which caused it. Dolly never dwelt long upon the pain she had suffered, and so, when the time came to forgive, she could forgive. She had all along been curiously blind to Robert's shortcomings; she had taken it for granted that she was in fault when he asserted the fact with quiet conviction; and now in the morning light she had been telling herself (all the time Squire Anley had been talking of his plans and benevolent schemes for a dinner at a café, presents for half the county, etc. etc.) that perhaps she herself had been surprised and embarrassed the night before, that Rhoda was looking on, that Robert was never very expansive or quick to say all that he really felt, that this would be their real meeting.

The kind squire soon went off pleased at the idea of a happy lovers' meeting. He knew that there had been some misunderstanding. He looked back as he left the room, but the stream of light was dazzling between them, and he could not see their faces for it.

He might have stayed; his presence would have been a relief, so Dolly thought afterwards, to that sad sunshiny half-hour through which her heart ached so bitterly. She grasped the poor little bunch of violets tight in her fingers, clenching the bitter disappointment. It was nothing that

she had to complain of, only everything. Had sorrow opened her eyes, had her own remorse opened her eyes?

'I did not think,' Robert was saying, 'I should see you so soon again, Dora. Poor Lady Sarah, of course, one could not expect. . . . I remember driving away,' he added, hastily, as her eyes filled, 'and wondering when I should get back; and then—yes, Marker called the cab back. I was glad of it afterwards. I had just time to come in and say good-by again. Do you remember?' And he tried to get up a little sentiment.

Dolly looked up suddenly. 'Why did Marker call you back, Robert?' she asked, in a curious voice.

'I had forgotten my great-coat,' said Robert. 'One wants all one's wraps in the sunny Mediterranean. How pleasant this is! Is it possible I have ever been away?' And then he sat down in an affectionate attitude by Dolly on the green velvet sofa. He would not scold her yet; he would try kindness he thought. He asked her about herself, tried to reproach her playfully for her recklessness in money matters, spoke of his own prospects, and the scheme which had brought him home. Martindale had resumed his old post at the college for six months. It is not necessary here to enter into all Robert's details. He spoke of a growing spirit of disaffection in the East, and suddenly he discovered that Dolly was no longer listening.

'Why do you tell me all this, Robert?' she said, hoarsely, forgetting the rôle of passive acquiescence she had promised herself to play.

It hurt Dolly somehow, and wearied her to talk to Robert upon indifferent subjects. The hour had come—the great hour that she had dreaded and longed for—and was this all that it had brought? Sometimes in a tone of his voice, in a well-known look, it would seem to her that reconciliation was at hand; but a word more, but a look more, and all

separation was over for ever—all reproach; but neither look nor word came. The key-note to all these variations of feeling never sounded. Poor Dolly hated and loved alternately during this cruel hour; loved the man she had loved so long, hated this strange perversion of her heart's dream. We love and we hate—not the face, nor the voice, nor the actions of this one or that one, but an intangible essence of all. And there sat Henley, talking very pleasantly, and changed somehow. Was that Robert? Was this herself? Was Robert dead too, or was it her own heart that was so cold.

Rhoda met her leaving the room some few minutes after.

'I have come to fetch you to luncheon,' said Miss Parnell. 'Is Mr. Henley there?' I see you have got your violets, Dolly. Miss Rougemont and I showed him the way to the flower-market. We met at the door. I am afraid she kept him too long. It was very wicked of her.'

Mrs. Palmer joined them at luncheon. Miss Rougemont carved and attended to their wants. Dolly was grateful for a Benjamin-like portion that she found heaped upon her plate, but she could not eat it. Everything tasted bitter somehow. Miss Rougemont was an odd, battered woman, with an inexpressive face; but she was not so insensible as Rhoda imagined. More than once during luncheon Dolly found her black rolling eyes fixed upon her face. Once, watching her opportunity, the companion came close up to Dolly and said, in a low voice, 'I wished to say to you that I hope you do not think that it was I who detained Mr. Henley this morning. Miss Parnell, who rarely considers other people's feelings, told me that she had told you that *I*——' Dolly blushed up.

'He came in very fair time,' she said, gently. Miss Rougemont did not seem satisfied. 'Forgive me,' she said. 'I am old and you are young. It is well to be upon one's

guard. It was not I who detained Mr. Henley.' She meant well, poor woman; but Dolly started away impatiently, blushing up with annoyance. How dare Miss Rougemont hint, and thrust her impertinent suspicions before her?

Squire Anley, with his loose clothes flying, with a parcel under each arm, with bonbons enough in his pockets for all the children in Pebblesthwaite, a list of names and addresses in his hand, was inquiring his way to a dressmaker, Mademoiselle Hays, whose bill he had promised Mrs. Boswarrick to pay. (Squire Anley often paid Mrs. Boswarrick's bills, and was repaid or not, as the case might be. At all events, he had the satisfaction of seeing the little lady in her pretty Paris dresses.) All day long the sunshine has been twinkling, carriages are rattling cheerfully over the stones, sightseers are sightseeing, the shops are full of pretty things.

Lord Cowley has just driven out of the great gates of the British Embassy, and the soldier has presented arms. Flash goes the bayonet in the sunshine. Squire Anley, looking about, suddenly sees Dorothea on the other side of the street, and crosses to meet her.

'Alone?' said he. 'This is very wrong. What are you doing? Where is everybody?'

'I am not alone,' said Dolly; 'they are in that shop. Rhoda went in to buy something, and she called Robert to give his advice.'

The Squire opened his eyes.

'It was very exemplary of Robert Henley to go when he was called,' he said, laughing. 'And where are you all going to?'

'I have to take some money from Mrs. Fane to a sick man in the English Hospital,' Dolly said. 'It is a long way off, I'm afraid. Mamma thought it too far, but they are coming with me.'

Here Robert came out of the shop to look for Dolly.

'I did not know you had stayed outside,' he said in his old affectionately dictatorial way, drawing her hand through his arm. 'I should have scolded you, but I see you have done us good service.' And he shook hands with the Squire.

'I was on my way to try and find you,' said the Squire. 'I have ordered dinner at the "Trois Frères" at six. Don't be late. I am the most punctual of men, as Miss Dolly knows by sad experience.'

Punctuality always seems to me a struggle between myself and all eternity,' said Dolly, smiling.

Robert looked at his watch, and then back at the shop. 'There is nothing more necessary,' he said. 'I promised Rhoda to come for her again in twenty minutes. She is divided between blue and sea-green. I am afraid we shall be almost too late for the hospital to-day. Can't you come back, Dolly, and help her in her choice?'

Dolly's face fell.

'I can't wait; I *must* go,' she said. 'The man is expecting his money to get home, and Mrs. Fane is expecting him.'

'To-morrow will do just as well, my dear Dolly. You are as impetuous as ever, I see,' said Robert. 'We can't leave Rhoda alone, now that we have brought her out.'

'To-morrow *won't* do,' cried Dolly, and she suddenly let go his arm. '*I* will go alone. I am used to it. I must go,' she insisted, with a nervous vehemence which surprised Mr. Anley. It was very unlike Dolly to be vexed about small matters.

But here Rhoda, smiling, came in turn from the door of the shop. She was dressed in violet and lilac and bright spring colours; in her hand she held a little bunch of flowers, not unlike that one which Robert had given Dolly at her suggestion.

'What is all this? Now we are going to the hospital?'

she said. 'I should have had my pony-carriage to-morrow —that was my only reason for wishing to put off the expedition.'

A large open carriage with four places was passing by; Robert stopped it, and they all three got in. Mr. Anley watched them as they drove away. He did not quite like the aspect of affairs. He had thought Dolly looking very sad when he met her standing at the shop door. What was Rhoda being so amiable about? He saw the lilac bonnet bending forward, and Dolly's crape veil falling as the carriage drove round the corner.

CHAPTER LII.

AN ANDANTE OF HAYDN'S.

On admire les fleurs de serre,
Qui, loin de leur soleil natal,
Comme des joyaux mis sous verre,
Brillent sous un ciel de crystal.

—T. GAUTIER.

THE carriage drove through the Place de la Concorde. The fountains were tossing and splashing sunlight, the shadow of the Obelisk was travelling across the pavement. The old palace still stood in its place, with its high crowding roofs, and shadows, and twinkling vanes. The early green was in every tree, lying bright upon avenues and slopes. It was all familiar—every dazzle and echo brought back Dolly's youthful remembrance. The merry-go-rounds were whirling under the trees. 'Tirez—tirez,' cried the ladies of the rouge-et-noir tables. 'For a penny the lemonade,' sang an Assyrian-looking figure, with a very hoarse voice, and a great tin box on his back. Then came Guignol's distant shriek, the steady roll of the carriages, and a distant sound of music as a regiment came marching across the bridge. The tune that they were playing sounded like a dirge to poor Dolly's heart, and so she sank back silently and let down her crape veil.

Meanwhile Rhoda and Robert were talking very happily together. They did not see that Dolly was crying behind her veil.

The hospital is a tranquil little place at the end of long avenues of plane-trees that run their dreary lengths for miles out of the gates of Paris. A blouse, a heap of stones, a market cart—there is nothing else to break the dreary monotone of straight pavement and shivering plane-tree repeated many hundred times. Sometimes you reach a cross-road: it is the same thing again. They came to the iron gates of the hospital at last, and crossed the front garden, and looked up at the open windows while they waited for admission. A nurse let them in without difficulty, and opened the door of a great airy, tranquil ward, where three or four invalids in cotton nightcaps were resting. The windows opened each way into silent gardens. It was all still and hushed and fresh; it must have seemed a strange contrast to some of the inmates. A rough, battered-looking man was lying on his back on his bed, listlessly tracing the lines of the ceiling with his finger. It was to him that the nurse led Dolly. 'This is Smith,' she said; 'he is very anxious to go home to England.'

The man hearing his name, sat up and turned a thin and stubbly-bearded face towards Dolly, and as he looked at her he half rose to his feet and stared at her hard: while she spoke to him, he still stared with an odd frightened look that was not rude, but which Dolly found embarrassing.

She hastily gave him the money and the message from Mrs. Fane. He was to come back to the home in —— Street. The nurse who had nursed him in the Crimea had procured his admission. He had been badly wounded; he was better, and his one longing was to get to England again. He had a little money, he said. He wanted to see his boy and give him the money. It was prize-money—the nurse had it to take care of; and still he went on staring at Dolly.

Dolly could not shake off the impression of that curious,

frightened look. She told the Squire about it when they met at the café that evening, as they sat after dinner in the starlight at little tables with coffee and ices before them, and cheerful crowds wandering round and round the arcades —some staring at the glittering shops, others, more sentimentally inclined, gazing at the stars overhead. Mrs. Palmer was absorbed in an ice.

Voices change in the twilight as colours do, and it seemed to Dolly that all their voices had the cadence of the night, as they sat there talking of one thing and another. Every now and then came little bursts of revelry, toned down and softened by the darkness. How clear the night was! What a great peaceful star was pausing over the gable of the old palace!

The Squire was giving extracts from his Yorkshire correspondence. 'Miss Bell said nothing of a certain report which had got about, to the effect that she was going to be married to Mr. Stock.' ('Pray, pray spare us,' from Mrs. Palmer.) But Bell did say something of expecting to have some news for the Squire on his return, if Norah did not forestall her with it. 'Mr. Raban is always coming. He is out riding now with papa and Norah; and we all think it an awfully jolly arrangement, and everybody is making remarks already.'

'One would really think Joanna had brought up her girls in the stables,' said Mrs. Palmer. 'I am sure I am very glad that Norah is likely to do so well. Though I *must* say I always thought Mr. Raban a poor creature, and so did you, Dolly.'

'I think he is one of the best and kindest friends I ever had,' said Dolly, abruptly.

'Nonsense, dearest,' said her mother. 'And so you really leave us,' continued Mrs. Palmer, sipping the pink and green ice, with her head on one side, and addressing Mr. Anley.

'I promised Miss Bell that I would ride with her on Thursday,' said the Squire; 'and a promise, you know . . .'

'It is not every one who has your high sense of honour,' said Mrs. Palmer, bitterly. 'Some promises—those made before the altar, for instance—seem only made to be broken.'

'Those I have never pledged myself to, Madam,' said the Squire, rubbing his hands.

'If some people only had the frankness to promise to neglect, to rob and to ill-use their wives, one could better understand their present conduct,' Mrs. Palmer continued, with a raised voice.

'A promise—what is a promise?' Rhoda asked in her clear soft flute; 'surely people change their minds sometimes, and then no one would wish to keep another person bound.'

'That is a very strange doctrine, my dear young lady,' said Mr. Anley, abruptly. 'Forgive me, if I say it is a ladies' doctrine. I hope I should not find any price too dear for my honour to pay. I am sure Henley agrees with me.'

Robert felt the Squire's eyes upon him: he twirled his watch-chain. 'I don't think it is a subject for discussion,' he said, impatiently. 'A gentleman keeps his word, of course, at a—every inconvenience.'

'Surely a mosquito?' exclaimed Mrs. Palmer. As she spoke, a sudden flash of zigzag light from some passage overhead suddenly lighted up the table and the faces of the little party assembled round it; it lit up one face and another, and flickered for an instant upon Rhoda's dark head: it flashed into Robert's face, and vanished.

And in that instant Dolly, looking up, had seen Rhoda, as she had never seen her before, leaning forward breathless, with one hand out, with beautiful gloomy eyes dilating and fixed upon Robert; but the light disappeared, and all was dark again.

They were all silent. Robert was recovering his ruffled temper. Mr. Anley was calling for the bill. Dolly was still following that zigzag ray of light in the darkness. Had it flashed into her dreams? had it revealed their emptiness, and that of my poor Dolly's shrine? Even Frank Raban was gone then. A painful incident came to disturb them all as they were still sitting there. The noise in the room overhead had been getting louder and louder. Mr. Anley suggested moving, and went to hurry the bill. Presently this noisy window was flung open wide, with a sudden loud burst of shrieks and laughter, and remonstrance, and streams of light—in the midst of which a pistol-shot went off, followed by a loud scream and a moment's silence. Mrs. Palmer shrieked. Robert started up exclaiming. Then came quick confusion, rising, as confusion rises, no one knows how nor from whence: people rushed struggling out of the café, hurrying up from the four sides of the quadrangle: a table was overturned. Rhoda flung herself upon Robert's arm, clinging to him for protection. Dolly caught hold of her mother's hand. 'Hush, mamma, don't be frightened,' she said, and she held her fingers tight. In all the noise and flurry and anxiety of that moment, she had again seen Robert turn to Rhoda with undisguised concern. He seemed to have forgotten that there was any one else in all that crowd to think of. The Squire, who had been but a few steps away, came hurrying back, and it was he who now drew Dolly and her mother safe into the shelter of an archway.

The silence of the summer night was broken, the placid beam of the stars overhead put out by flaring lights—and anxious, eager voices, that were rung on every side. 'He has killed himself'—'He wounded her,' said some. 'Wounded three,' said others. 'She shot the pistol,' cried others. Then came a man pushing through the crowd—a doctor. 'Let him pass, let him pass!' said the people, surging back to

make way. Squire Anley looked very grave as he stood between the two ladies and the crowd: every minute it grew more dense and more confused. Robert and Rhoda had been swept off in a different direction.

Afterwards they learnt that some unhappy wretch, tired of life and ashamed of his miserable existence, had drawn out a pistol and attempted to shoot himself that night as they were sitting under the window. His companions had thought he was in fun, and only laughed until he had drawn the trigger. They were thankful to escape from the crowd, and to walk home through the cheerful streets, rattling and flaring among these unnumbered tragedies.

The pistol-shot was still in Dolly's ears, and the ray of light still dazzling in her eyes, as she walked home, following her mother and the Squire.

As she threaded her way step by step, she seemed to be in a sort of nightmare, struggling alone against the overwhelming rush of circumstances, the remorseless partings and histories of life—threading her way alone through the crowds. The people seemed to her absorbed and hurrying by. Were they too alone in the world? Had that woman passing by been deceived in her trust? Dolly was surprised at the throb in her heart, at the curious rush of emotions in her mind. They were unlike those to which she was used. 'Your part is played,' said some voice dinning in her ears. 'For him the brand of faithless coldness of heart; for him the discredit, for him the shame of owning to his desertion. You are not to blame. You have kept your word; you have been faithful. He has failed. Explanations cannot change the truth of facts. Even strangers see it all. Mr. Anley sees it. Now at last you are convinced.'

Dolly followed her mother and Mr. Anley upstairs. Rhoda and Robert were not come in. Mr. Anley, looking very grave, said he would go and look for them. Philippa

flung herself wearily upon the drawing-room sofa: the fire was burning, and the little log of wood crumbling in embers. Dolly raked the embers together, and then came and stood by her mother. 'Good-night, mamma,' she said. 'I am tired; I am going to bed,' she said, in a sort of fixed, heavy way.

'It is your own fault,' answered her mother, bursting out in vague answer to her own thoughts. 'Mr. Anley says that Robert is behaving very strangely. If you think he is too attentive to Rhoda, you should tell him so, instead of looking at me in that heavy, disagreeable way. You know as well as I do that he means nothing; and you are really so depressed, dearest, that it is no wonder a young man prefers joking and flirting with an agreeable girl,' and Mrs. Palmer thumped the cushions. 'Give me a kiss, Dolly,' she said. To do her justice, she was only scolding her daughter out of sympathy, and because she did not know what other tone to take.

Dolly did not answer. She felt hard and fierce; a sort of scorn had come over her. There seemed no one to go to now —no, not one. If George had been there, all would have been so different, she thought; and then his warning words came back to her once more.

Dolly put her hand to her heart and stood silent until her mother had finished. There was pain and love and fire in a heart like poor Dolly's, humble and passionate, faithful and impressionable, and sadly tried just now by one of the bitter trials that come to young lives—blows that seem to jar away the music for ever. Later comes the peaceful possession of life, which is as a revelation when the first flare of youth has passed away; but for Dorothea that peaceful time was not yet. Everything was sad. She was not blind. She could understand what was passing before her eyes. She seemed to read Robert's secret set plainly before her. She had stopped Miss Rougemont more than once when she had

begun some mysterious word of warning; but she knew well enough what she would have said.

'A man must keep his word, at every inconvenience,' said Robert.

Perhaps if Frank had never spoken, never revealed his story, Dolly might still have been unconscious of the meaning of the signs and words and symbols that express the truth.

Marker asked no questions. She brushed Dolly's long tawny mane, and left her at last in her white wrapper sitting by the bed.

'Are you well, my dearie?' said the old woman, coming back and stroking her hair with her hand.

Dolly smiled, and answered by holding up her face to be kissed, and Marker went away more happy.

Whatever she felt, whatever her secret determination may have been, Dolly said not one word neither to her mother nor to her friend the Squire. She avoided Miss Rougemont's advances with a sort of horror. To Robert and Rhoda she scarcely spoke, although she did not avoid them. Robert thought himself justified in remonstrating with her for her changed manner.

'I am waiting until I know what my manner should be, Robert,' said Dolly, bitterly.

Robert thought Dolly very much altered indeed. As Dolly shrank back more and more into herself, Rhoda seemed to bloom and brighten—she thought of everybody and everything, she tried in a hundred ways to please her friend. Dolly, coming home lonely and neglected, would find, perhaps, fresh roses on her toilet. 'Miss Rhoda put them there,' Marker would say, grimly, and Dolly would laugh a hard sort of laugh. But all this time she said no word, gave no sign. 'For *them* should be the shame of confessing their treachery,' said this angry sullen demon that seemed to have possessed the poor child. And all the while Robert,

serene in his ultimate intentions and honourable sentiments, came and went, and Rhoda put all disagreeable thoughts of the future away. She had never deliberately set herself to supplant her friend, but she had deliberately set herself to win over Henley, and, if possible, to gain his support to her claims. It had seemed an impossible task. Rhoda was surprised, flattered, and bewildered to find how easily she had gained her wish, how soon her dream had come true. There it stood solid and complacent before her, laughing at one of her sallies; Rhoda began to realise that this was, of all dreams, the one she believed in most. It was something for Rhoda to have found a faith of any sort. At all events, there was now one other person besides herself in Rhoda's world. If Dolly was cross, it was her own fault. Miss Rougemont, too, had been disagreeable and prying of late —she must go. And as for Uncle John, if he wrote any more letters like that last one which had come, she should burn them unread.

No one ever knew the struggle that went on in Dolly's mind all through these bright spring days, while Rhoda was dreaming her tranquil little visions, while Robert was agreeably occupied, flirting with Rhoda, while they were all coming and going from one pleasant scene to another, and the roses were blooming once more in the garden at All Saints', while Signor Pappaforte was warbling to Mrs. Palmer's accompaniment, and Frank Raban, riding across the moors, was hard at work upon one scheme and another. He did not know it, but the crisis had come.

It was a crowded hall, a thousand people sitting in silent and breathless circles. An andante of Haydn's was in the air. It was a sweet and delicate music, both merry and melancholy, tripping to a sunshiny measure that set everybody's heart beating in time. There was a childish grace

about the strain that charmed all the listeners to a tender enthusiasm. It made them cry and laugh at once; and though many sat motionless and stolid, you might see eyes shining and dilating, as mothers' eyes dilate sometimes when they watch their children at play. The childless were no longer childless while that gentle, irresistible music shook from the delicate strings of the instruments; the lonely and silent had found a voice; the hard of heart and indifferent were moved and carried away; pent-up longings were set free. Other strings were sounding with the Haydn; and it was not music, though it was harmony, of some sort that struck and shook those mysterious fibres that bind men and women to life. The hopelessness of the lonely, the mad longings of the parted, the storm of life, all seemed appeased. To Dolly, it was George's voice that was speaking once again. 'Peace, be still,' said the music, and a divine serenity was in the great hall where the little tune was thrilling.

In former times men and women assembled in conclave to see wild beasts tearing their prey; to-day it was to listen to a song of Haydn's—a little song, that did not last five minutes.

It had not ended when Rhoda whispered something into Robert's ear.

While the music was lasting Dolly was transported; as it ended her mind seemed clear. She was at peace, she understood it all, all malice and uncharitableness seemed *dissolved*—I know no better word—pangs of wounded pride, bitterness of disappointed trust, shame of unfulfilled promise —such things were, but other things, such as truth, honest intention, were beyond them, and Dolly felt at that moment as if she could rise above her fate, above her own faults, beyond her own failures. She would confess the truth to Robert: she had meant to be faithful to him; she had failed; she would take what blame there was upon herself,

and that should be her punishment. She was too keen-sighted not to understand all that had been passing before her eyes. At first wounded and offended, and not unjustly pained, she had determined to wait in silence, to let Henley explain his own intentions, acknowledge his own shortcomings.

But something more generous, more truthful, impelled her now to speak. Rhoda and Robert were whispering. 'Hush,' Dolly said, and she laid her hand upon Robert's arm. He started a little uncomfortably, and then began suddenly to nod his head and to twirl his umbrella in time. Rhoda buttoned her long gloves and leant back in a pensive attitude. Dolly sat staring at the violins, of which the bows were flowing like the waves of a spring-tide on either side of the circle: beyond the violins were the wind instruments and the great violoncellos throbbing their full hearts. There was instant silence, then a clapping of hands and a sort of murmur and sigh coming from a hundred breasts. As it all died away, Dolly stood up and turned to Robert: an impulse came to her to do now what was in her heart, to wait no longer.

'Robert ——' her voice sounded so oddly that he started and half rose, looking down at her upturned face. 'Robert, I want you to listen to me,' said Dolly. 'I must tell you now when I can speak. I see it all. You were right to doubt me. I know it now. I have not been true to you. You must marry Rhoda,' she said; then, stopping short, 'I'm not jealous, only I am bewildered. . . I am going home. . . Don't come with me; but you forgive me, don't you, Robert?'

There was a sudden burst from some overture—the music was beginning again. Before Robert could stop her, Dolly was gone; she had started up, she had left her seat, her gloves were lying on the ground, her veil was lying on the

bench, but it was too late to follow or to call her back ; the people, thinking she was ill, had made way for her, and closed in round the door.

'What has happened?' said Rhoda. 'Is she ill or angry? is she gone? Oh, what has happened? Don't leave me here alone, let me come too. . .'

Robert flushed up. 'The eyes of the whole place are upon us,' he muttered: then came something like an oath.

'Hush, silence,' said the people behind.

Robert bit his lip and sat staring at the conductor's rod; every now and then he gave a little impatient jerk of the head.

Rhoda waited her time; he had not followed Dolly. The music went on; not one note did she hear; the time seemed interminable. But Robert, hearing a low sigh, turned at last; he did not speak, but he looked at her.

'You are angry?' whispered Rhoda.

'Why should I be angry with you?' he answered, more gently.

CHAPTER LIII.

THAT THOU ART BLAMED SHALL NOT BE THY DEFECT.

Yesterday *this* day's madness did prepare,
To-morrow's silence, triumph, or despair.
Drink! for you know not whence you came, nor why;
Drink! for you know not why you go, nor where.

—OMAR KHAYYÁM.

ONCE, as Dolly was hurrying away through the passages to the great front entrance, she looked back, for she thought she heard Robert's step coming after her. It was only Casimir, the servant, who had been loitering by a staircase, and had seen her pass. She came to the great wide doors of the music-hall, where the people were congregated, the servants carrying their mistresses' carriage cloaks over their arms, the touters and vendors of programmes. The music was still in her ears; she felt very calm, very strange. Casimir would have darted off for the carriage if she had not stopped him.

'Is Mademoiselle indisposed? Shall I accompany her?' he asked.

But although Dolly looked very pale, she said she was not ill; she would go home alone: and when she was safely seated in the little open carriage he called for her, the colour came back into her cheeks. She leant back, for she was very tired. As she drove along she tried to remember what had happened, to think what more would happen, but she could not do so. It was a feeling, not an event, that had moved her so; and the outward events that relate these great unseen

histories to others are to the actors themselves of little consequence. As for the future, Dolly could scarcely believe in a future. Was anything left to her now? Her life seemed over, and she was scarcely twenty; she was sorry for herself. She did not regret what she had done, for he did not love her. It was Rhoda whom he loved; Rhoda who seemed to have absorbed everything, little by little. There was nothing that she had spared. Dolly wondered what they would say at the Court. She thought of Frank Raban, too. If the Squire's news was true, Frank Raban would be thinking no more of her, but absorbed in other interests. Even Frank—was any one faithful in life? Then she thought of George: he had not failed: he had been true to the end, and this comforted her.

Everything seemed to have failed with her, and yet—how shall I explain it?—Dolly was at peace with herself. In her heart she knew that she had tried, almost tried to do her best. No pangs of conscience assailed her as she drove home through this strange chaos of regrets and forgetfulness. Her hands fell into her lap as she leant back in the little carriage: it was bringing her away through the dull rattle of the streets to a new home, a new life, swept and garnished, so it seemed to Dolly, where everything was strange and bare—one in which, perhaps, little honour was to be found, little credit. What did she care! She was too true a lady to trouble herself about resentments and petty slights and difficulties. They had both meant to do right. As for Rhoda, Dolly would not think of Rhoda just then, it hurt her. For George's sake she must try to think kindly of her; was it for *her* to cast a stone? Dolly came upstairs slowly and steadily, opened the door, which was on the latch, and came in, looking for her mother. Miss Vanborough had never, not even in the days of her happy love, looked more beautiful than she did as she came into the little sitting-room at home. A light

was in her face; it was the self-forgetful look of someone who has passed for a moment beyond the common state of life, escaping the assaults of selfish passion, into a state where feeling is not destroyed but multiplied beyond itself. In these moods sacrifice scarcely exists. The vanities of the world glitter in vain, discord cannot jar, and in the midst of tumult and sorrow souls are at peace.

Mrs. Palmer was not alone; the Squire was there. He had brought news. He had been detained by a peremptory telegram from Norah—'*Jonah arrives Paris to-morrow; mamma says, remain; bring Jonah home*'—and Jonah, who had come almost at the same time as the telegram, had accompanied the Squire, and was waiting impatiently enough hoping to see Dolly. He had been somewhat bored by the little elderly flirtation which had been going on for the last half-hour between his aunt and his godfather (which sort of *pot-pourri*, retaining a certain faint perfume of bygone roses, is not uncommon); but he did not move, except to go and stand out upon the balcony and stare up and down the street; he was leaning over the slender railing when Dolly came in, and so it happened that at first she only saw the Squire sitting by her mother's easy-chair. She gave him her hand. He stood holding it in his, and looking at her, for he saw that something had happened.

'Alone!' said Mrs. Palmer. 'Is Robert with you? I have some news for you; guess, Dolly;' and Philippa looked archly towards the window.

Dolly looked at her mother. 'I left them at the concert,' she said, not asking what the news was.

'What made you leave them? Why do you stare at me like that?' cried Mrs. Palmer, forgetting her news. 'Have you had another quarrel? Dolly, I have only just been saying so to Mr. Anley; under the circumstances you really should *not*—you *really* should ——'

'It has all been a mistake, mamma,' said Dolly, looking up, though she did not see much before her. 'Everything is over. Robert and I have parted, quite parted,' she repeated sadly.

'Parted!' exclaimed the Squire; 'has it come to this?'

'Parted!' cried poor exasperated Philippa. 'I warned you. It is your own fault, Dolly; you have been possessed all along. Mr. Anley, what is to be done?' cried the poor lady, turning from one to the other. 'Is it your doing or Robert's? Dolly, what is it all about?'

Dolly did not answer for an instant, for she could not speak.

The Squire began muttering something between his teeth, as he strode up and down the room with his hands in his pockets.

'Take care, you will knock over the jardinière,' cried Mrs. Palmer.

Dolly's eyes were all full of tears by this time. As he turned she laid her hand upon the old man's arm. 'It is my doing, not his,' she said. 'You must not be hard upon him; indeed it is all my doing.'

It is your doing now, and most properly,' said the Squire, very gravely, and not in the least in his usual half-joking manner. 'I can only congratulate you upon having got rid of that abominable prig; but you must not take it all upon yourself, my poor child.'

Dolly blushed up. 'You think it is not my fault,' she said, and the glow spread and deepened; 'he was not bound when he left me, only I had promised to wait'—then with sudden courage, 'You will not blame him when I tell you this,' she said: 'I have not been true to him, not quite true—I told him so; it was a pity, all a pity,' she said, with a sigh. She stood with hanging hands and a sweet, wistful, tender face; her voice was like a song in its unconscious

rhythms, for deep feeling gives a note to people's voices that is very affecting sometimes.

'You told him so—what will people say?' shrieked poor Mrs. Palmer; 'and here is Jonah, whom we have quite forgotten.'

Jonah was standing listening with all his honest ears. It seemed to the young soldier that he also had been listening to music, to some sweet sobbing air played with tender touch. It seemed to fill the room even after Dolly had left it; for when she turned and suddenly saw her cousin it was the climax of that day's agitation. She came up and kissed him with a little sob of surprise and emotion, tried to speak in welcome, and then shook her head and quickly went away, shutting the door behind her. As Dolly left the room the two men looked at one another. They were almost too indignant with Henley to care to say what they thought of his conduct. 'Had not we better go?' said Jonah, awkwardly, after a pause.

But Mrs. Palmer could not possibly dispense with an audience on such an occasion as this; she made Jonah promise to return to dinner, she detained the Squire altogether to detail to him the inmost feelings of a mother's heart; she sent for cups of tea. 'Is Miss Dolly in her room, Julie?' she asked.

'Yes, Madame; she has locked the door,' said Julie.

'Go and knock, then, immediately, Julie; and come and tell me what she says, poor dear.'

Then Mrs. Palmer stirs her own tea, and describes all that she has felt ever since first convinced of Robert's change of feeling. Her experience had long ago taught her to discover those signs of indifference which . . . . The poor Squire listens in some impatience.

Meanwhile Robert and Rhoda are driving home together

from the concert, flattered, dazzled, each pursuing their own selfish schemes, each seeing the fulfilment of small ambitions at hand, and Dolly, sitting at the foot of her bed, is saying good-by again and again. The person she had loved, and longed to see, and thought of day after day and hour after hour, was not Henley, but some other quite different man, with his face, perhaps, but with another soul and nature.' . . . . That Robert, who had been so dear to her at one time, so vivid, so close a friend, so wise, so sympathetic, so strong, and so tender, was nothing, no one—he had never existed. The death of this familiar friend, the dispersion of this familiar ghost seemed, for a few hours, as if it meant her own annihilation. All her future seemed to have ended here. It was true that she had accused herself openly of want of faithfulness; but the mere fact of having accused herself seemed to make that self-reproach lighter and more easy to bear. After some time she roused herself; Marker was at the door and saying that it was dinner-time, and Dolly let her in and dressed for dinner in a dreamy sort of way, taking the things, as Marker handed them to her, in silence, one by one. The Squire and Jonah were both in the sitting-room when Dolly came in in the white dress she usually wore, with some black ribbons round her waist, and tied into her bronze hair. She did not want to look as if she was a victim, and she tried to smile as usual.

'You must not mind me,' she said presently, in return for the Squire's look of sympathy. 'It is not to-day that this has happened; it began so long ago that I am used to it now.' Then she added, 'Mamma, I should like to see Robert again this evening, for I left him very abruptly, and I am afraid he may be unhappy about me.'

'Oh, as to that, Dolly, from what the Squire tells me, I don't think you need be at all alarmed,' cried Dolly's mamma: 'Jonah met him on the stairs with Rhoda, and really, from

what I hear, I think he must have already proposed. I wonder if he will have the face to come in himself to announce it.'

Both Jonah and the Squire began to talk together, hoping to stop Mrs. Palmer's abrupt disclosures; but who was there who could silence Mrs. Palmer? She alluded a great deal to a certain little bird, and repeatedly asked Dolly during dinner whether she thought this dreadful news could be true, and Robert really engaged to Rhoda?

'I think it is likely to be true before long, mamma,' said Dolly, patiently: 'I hope so.'

She seemed to droop and turn paler and paler in the twilight. She was not able to pretend to good spirits that she did not feel; but her sweetness and simplicity went straight to the heart of her two champions, who would have gladly thrown Robert out of the first-floor window if Dolly had shown the slightest wish for it.

After dinner, as they all sat in the front room, with wide-evening windows, Julie brought in the lamp. She would have shut out the evening and drawn down the blinds if they had not prevented her. The little party sat silently watching the light dancing and thrilling behind the house-tops; nobody spoke. Dolly leant back wearily. From time to time Mrs. Palmer whispered any fresh surmise into the Squire's ear: 'Why did not Robert come? Was *she* keeping him back?'

Presently Mrs. Palmer started up: a new idea had occurred to her. She would go in herself, unannounced: she would learn the truth: the Squire, he too, must come. The Squire did as he was bid: as they left the room Jonah got up shyly from his seat, and went and stood out on the balcony. Dolly asked him whether there was a moon.

'There is a moon rising,' said the Captain, 'but you can't see it from where you sit; there from the sofa you can see it.' And then he came back, and wheeled the sofa

round, and began turning down the wheel of the lamp, saying it put the moonlight out.

As the lamp went out suddenly with a splutter, all the dim radiance of the silver evening came in a soft vibration to light the darkened room. One stream of moonlight trickled along the balcony, another came lapping the stone coping of the window: the moon was rising in state and in silence, and Dolly leant back among her cushions, watching it all with wide open eyes. Jonah's dark cropped head rose dark against the Milky Way. As the moon rose above the gable of the opposite roof a burst of chill light flooded the balcony, and overflowed, and presently reached the foot of the couch where Dolly was lying, worn out by her long day.

Robert, who had been taking a rapid walk on the pavement outside, had not noticed the moon: he was preoccupied by more important matters. Rhoda's speeches were ringing in his ears. Yet it was Dolly's fault all along; he was ready to justify himself; to meet complaint with complaint; she might have been a happy woman. He had behaved honourably and forbearingly; and now it was really unfair that she should expect anything more from him, or complain because he had found his ideal in another and more feminine character.

Dolly had heard the roll of the wheels of the carriage that brought Robert and Rhoda home, but she had not heard the short little dialogue which was being spoken as the wheels rolled under the gateway. The two had not said much on the way. Rhoda waited for Robert to speak. Robert sat gazing at his boots.

'One knows what everybody will say,' he said at last very crossly.

'The people who know you as I do will say that Dolly might have been a happy woman,' Rhoda answered; 'that

she has wrecked her own happiness;' and then they were both again silent.

Rhoda was frightened, and trembled as she looked into Robert's offended face. She thought that the end of it all might be that he would go—leave her and all other complications, and Rhoda had not a few of her own. If he were to break free? Rhoda's heart beat with apprehension; her feeling for Robert was more genuine than most of her feelings, and this was her one excuse for the part she had played. Her nature was so narrow, her life had been so stinted, that the first touch of sentiment overbalanced and carried her away. Dolly possessed the genius of living and loving and being to a degree that Rhoda could not even conceive; with all her tact and quickness she could not reach beyond herself. For some days past she had secretly hoped for some such catastrophe as that which had just occurred. She had taken the situation for granted.

'One sometimes knows by instinct what people feel,' she said at last. 'I have long felt that Dolly did not understand you; but then, indeed, you are not easy to understand.' And Robert, raising his eyes from his boots, met the beautiful gloom of her speaking eyes.

One has sometimes watched a cat winding its way between little perils of every sort. Rhoda softly and instinctively avoided the vanities of Robert's mind; she was presently telling him of her troubles, money troubles among the rest. She had spent more than her income; she did not dare confess to Mr. Tapeall; she felt utterly incapable of managing that fortune which ought never to have been hers—which she was ready to give up at any hour.

'Cleverer people than I am might do something with all this money,' said Rhoda. 'Something worth doing: but I seem only to get into trouble. You say you will help me, but you will soon be gone.'

'I shall be always ready to advise you,' said Robert. 'If there is anything at any time——'

'But when you are gone?' said Rhoda, with great emotion.

There was a pause; the horses clattered in under the gateway.

'You must tell me to stay,' said Robert in a low voice, as he helped Rhoda out of the carriage.

As the two slowly mounted the staircase which Dolly had climbed, Jonah, coming away from his aunt's apartment, almost ran up against them. Robert exclaimed, but Jonah passed on. What did Rhoda care that he brushed past as if he had not seen them? She was sure he had seen them, and Rhoda had her own reasons for wishing no time to be lost before her news was made public. She had won her great stake, secured her prize: her triumph was not complete until others were made aware of all that had happened. She urged Robert to tell his aunt at once.

'It is only fair to yourself. Dolly will be telling her story—dear Dolly, she is always so kind; but still, as you have often said, there are two sides to a question. I am afraid your cousin passed us intentionally,' said Rhoda. 'Not that I care for anything now.'

'Let us have our dinner in peace,' said Robert; 'and then I will tell them anything you like,' and he sank down comfortably into one of the big arm-chairs, not sorry to put after dinner out of her mind. While he was with Rhoda he was at ease with himself, and thought of nothing else; but he had vague feelings of a conscience standing outside on the landing and ready to clutch him as he passed out of the charm of her presence.

He did not go straight off to his aunt when he left Rhoda, and so it happened that he missed Mrs. Palmer when she burst in upon Rhoda and Miss Rougemont. The resolute

Robert was pacing the pavement outside and trying to make up his mind to face those who seemed to him now more like life-long enemies than friends. He took courage at last and determined to get it over, and he turned up the street again and climbed the staircase once more. Philippa had left the hall-door open, and Robert walked in as he had been used to do; he opened the drawing-room door. He was angry with Dolly still, angry with her mother, and ready to resent their reproaches. Robert opened the drawing-room door and stopped short at the threshold. . . .

The room was not dark, for the bright moonlight was pouring in. Dolly was still lying asleep. A log burnt low in the fire-place, crimsoning the silver light. Robert was startled. He came forward a few steps and stood in the darkened room looking at the sleeping girl: something in her unconsciousness, in the utter silence, in the absence of reproach, smote him as no words of blame or appeal could have done. His excuses, his self-assertions, of what good were they here—who cared for them here? She scarcely moved, she scarcely seemed to breathe; her face looked calm, it was almost like the face of a dead person; and so she was—dead to him.

For an instant he was touched; taken by surprise; he longed to awaken her, to ask her to forgive him for leaving her; but as he stood there a dark figure appeared in the open window; it was Jonah, who did not speak, but who pointed to the door.

At any other time Robert might have resented this, but to-night something had moved his cold and selfish heart, some ray from Dolly's generous spirit had unconsciously reached him at last. He turned away and went quietly out of the room, leaving her sleeping still.

He did not see her again; two days later she left for England.

CHAPTER LIV.

HOLY ST. FRANCIS, WHAT A CHANGE IS HERE!

> If when in cheerless wanderings dull and cold,
> A sense of human kindliness hath found us,
> We seem to have around us
> An atmosphere all gold.
>
> —A. Clough.

Twelve o'clock is striking in a bare room full of sunshine. A woman, who is spending her twelfth year in bed, is eating tripe out of a basin; another sitting by the fire is dining off gruel; beds and women alternate all down the ward; two nurses are coming and going, one of them with a black eye. Little garlands of paper, cleverly cut out, decorate the place in honour of some Royal birthday. Two little flags are stuck up against the wall and flying triumphantly from the farther end of the room. A print of the Royal Family, brilliantly coloured, is also pinned up. Mrs. Fane is walking down the middle of the workhouse infirmary with a basket on her arm, when one of the old women puts out a wrinkled hand to call her back.

'Ain't we grand, mum?' says the old woman, looking up. 'It does us all good;' and she nods and goes on with her gruel again.

'How is Betty Hodge to-day?' says Mrs. Fane. The old woman points significantly.

All this time some one has been lying quite still at the further end of the room, covered by a sheet.

'At eight o'clock this morning she went off werry comfortable,' says the old woman. 'Mrs. Baker she is to scrub the steps now; the matron sent word this morning.'

That is all. In this infirmary of the workhouse it is a matter of course that people should die. It does not mean a black carriage, nodding feathers, nor blinds drawn, and tombstones with inscriptions. It means, ease at last, release from the poor old body that used to scrub the steps so wearily day after day. There it was, quite still in the sunshine, with the garlands on the wall.

'*I* shan't be long,' said the old tripe-woman, sententiously. 'She has been expecting to go for months. A friend has sent her a shroud and some silver paper ready cut; she says it is all ready, and she has seen the priest.'

'Ah! Mrs. Blaney, you are a sufferer,' says the nurse with the black eye. 'She can't eat, mum, but she likes her cup of tea;' and the nurse, who also likes her cup of tea, eyes the little packet which she sees coming out of Mrs. Fane's basket, and fetches a canister, into which she elaborately shakes the refreshing shower.

Mrs. Fane hurries on, for she has a guest at home expecting her, and a tea-party organising for that afternoon, and she has still a visit to pay in the men's ward. Some one brought her a message—a man called Smith wanted to speak to her; and she walked along the whitewashed walls and past check blue counterpanes, looking for her petitioner. By one of the high windows of the ward lay a brown haggard face, with a rough chin, and the little old slip-shod messenger pointed to attract Mrs. Fane's attention. She remembered the man at once. He had come to see her not long before. She had sent him some money to Paris—his own money, that he had given to a nurse to keep. Mrs. Fane looked with her kind round eyes into the worn face that tried to upraise itself to greet her.

'I am sorry to see you here,' she said. 'Did you not find your friends?'

'Gone to America,' gasped the man.

'You know I have still got some of your money,' said Mrs. Fane, sitting down by the bedside.

'It were about that I made so bold as to hask for to see you, mum,' said the man. 'I have a boy at Dartford,' he went on, breathing painfully. 'He ain't a good boy, but I've wrote to him to go to you, and if you would please keep the money for him, mum—three pound sixteen the Reverend calc'lated it—with what you sent for my journey here. I had better have stopped where I was and where the young lady found me. Lord! what a turn she giv' me. I know'd it was all up when I seed her come in.'

He was muttering on vacantly, as people do who are very weak. Mrs. Fane's kind heart ached for his lonely woe-begone state. She took his hand in hers—how many sick hands had she clasped in her healing palm—but poor Smith was beyond her help.

'I see a young fellow that died beside me at the battle of the Alma,' said Smith, 'and when that young lady came up, as you might be, it brought it all back as it might be now. He was a gentleman, they said; he weren't half a bad chap.'

'Who are you speaking of?' said Mrs. Fane, not quite following.

'They called him George—George Vance,' said the man; 'but that were not his name no more than Smith is mine.'

'I have heard of a man of that name who was wounded at the Alma; I did not know that he had died there,' said Mrs. Fane. Her hand began to tremble a little, but she spoke very quietly.

Smith hesitated for a minute, then he looked up into the clear constraining eyes that seemed to him to be expect-

ing his answer. 'It ain't no odds to me now,' he said, hoarsely, whether I speak the tru—uth or not; you're a lady, and will keep the money safe for my poor lad. Captain Henley he offered a matter o' twenty pound if we found poor Vance alive. He were a free-handed chap were poor Vance. We know'd he would not grudge the money. . . . And when the Roosians shot him, poor fellow, it wasn't no odds to him.'

Mrs. Fane looking round saw the chaplain passing, and she whispered to the old attendant to bring him to her.

'And so you said that you had found him alive, I suppose?' said Mrs. Fane, quickly guessing at the truth.

'Well, mum, you ain't far wrong,' said Smith, looking at his thin brown fingers. 'There was another chap of our corps died on the way to the ships. It were a long way to carry them down to the shore: we changed their names. We didn't think we had done no great harm; for twenty pound is twenty pound; but I have heard as how a fortune was lost thro' it all—a poor chap like me has no fortune to lose.'

'It was the young lady you saw who lost her fortune,' said Mrs. Fane, controlling herself, and trying to hide her agitation. 'You did her great injury, you see, though you did not mean it. But you can repair this wrong. I think you will like to do so,' she said, 'and—and—we shall all be very much obliged to you.' 'Mr. Morgan,' Mrs. Fane continued, turning to the chaplain, who had come up to the bedside, 'here is a poor fellow who wishes to do us a service, and to make a statement, and I want you to take it down.' She had writing materials in her basket. She often wrote the sick people's letters for them.

'What is it, my man?' said the chaplain; but as he listened his face changed. He gave one amazed and significant glance at Mrs. Fane, then biting his lips and trying to seem unmoved, he wrote and signed the paper; Mrs. Fane signed it; and then, at her request, poor bewildered

Smith feebly scrawled his name. He did it because he was told: he did not seem to care much one way or another for anything more.

'Joe can tell you all about it,' he said. 'Joe Carter—he has took his discharge. I don't know where he is—Liverpool may be.'

John Morgan could hardly contain his excitement, and his umbrella whirled like a mill, as he left the workhouse. 'You *are* a good woman; you *have* done a good morning's work,' said the chaplain, as he came away with Mrs. Fane; 'say nothing more at present. We must find out this Joe who was with him. Whatever we do let us be silent, and keep this from that wretched, scheming girl.'

Afterwards, it turned out, that it would have been better far if John Morgan had spoken openly at the time; but his terror of Rhoda's schemes was so great that he felt that if she only knew all, she would lay hands on Joe, carry off Smith himself, make him unsay all he had said. 'There is no knowing what that woman may not do,' said Morgan. 'She wrote to me; I have not answered the letter. Do you know that the marriage is actually fixed? I am very glad that you have got Dolly away from that adder's nest.'

'So am I,' said Mrs. Fane, beaming for an instant; she had long ago taken Dolly to her heart with a confused feeling of some maternal fibre strung, of something more tender and more enduring than the mere friendship between a girl and an older woman.

I cannot help it if most of those who knew my Dolly persisted in spoiling her. She wanted every bit of kindness and sunshine that came in her way. And yet she was free from the strain that had wrenched her poor little life, she need no longer doubt her own feelings, nor blind herself to that which she would so gladly escape.

The morbid fight was over, and the world was at peace.

It was at peace, but unutterably sad, empty, meaningless. When people complain that their lives are dull and have no meaning, it is that they themselves have no meaning. Dolly felt as if she had been in the thick of the fight, and come away wounded. 'I may as well be here as anywhere else,' she had said that moonlight evening when poor Jonah had entreated her in vain to come away with him.

Dolly would not go back to Henley; she had her own reasons for keeping away. But next morning, when an opportune letter came from Mrs. Fane, Dolly, who had lain awake all night, went to her mother, who had slept very comfortably, and said, 'Mamma, if you can spare me, I think I will go over to England with the Squire and Jonah for a little time, until the marriage is over.' Mrs. Palmer was delighted. 'To Yorkshire? Yes, dearest, the very best thing you can do.'

'Not to Henley, mamma,' Dolly said; 'I should like, please, to go to Mrs. Fane's, if you do not object.'

'What a child you are,' cried Mrs. Palmer; 'you prefer poking yourself away in that horrid, dismal hospital, when poor Jonah is on his knees to you to go back to Henley with him.'

'Perhaps that is the reason why I must not go, mamma,' said Dolly, smiling. 'I must not have any explanations with Jonah.' Mrs. Palmer was seriously angry, and settled herself down for another nap.

So Dolly came to England one summer's afternoon, escorted by her faithful knights. All the streets were warm and welcoming; the windows were open, and the shadows were painting the pretty old towers and steeples of the city; some glint of an Italian sky had come to visit our northern world.

John Morgan met her at the train, Mrs. Fane stood on

the door-step to welcome her, the roar of the streets sounded homelike and hopeful once more.

As for Lady Henley she was furiously jealous when she heard of Dolly in London, and with Mrs. Fane. She abused her to everybody for a fortnight. Jonah had come home for two days and then returned to town again. 'That is all we get of him after all we have gone through,' cried poor Lady Henley; 'however, perhaps there is a good reason for it; all one wants is to see one's children happy,' said the little lady to Mr. Redmayne, who was dining at the Court.

John Morgan lost no time in writing to his confessor, Frank Raban, to tell him of the strange turn that events had taken. 'I entreat you to say no word of this to any one,' said Morgan. 'I am afraid of other influence being brought to bear upon this man that we are in search of, and it is most necessary that we should neglect no precautions. Dolly's interests have been too carelessly served by us all.' Raban was rather annoyed by this sentence in Morgan's letter. What good would it have done to raise an opposition that would have only pained a person who was already sorely tried in other ways? Frank somewhat shared Dolly's carelessness about money, as we know. Perhaps in his secret heart it had seemed to him that it was not for him to be striving to gain a fortune for Dolly—a fortune that she did not want. Now he suddenly began to blame himself and determined to leave no stone unturned to find the evidence that was wanted. And yet he was more estranged from Dolly at this moment than he had ever been in his life before. He had purposely abstained from any communication with her. He knew she was in London and he kept away.

Frank Raban was a man of a curious doggedness and tenderness of nature. When he had once set his mind to a thing he went through with his mind. He could not help

himself any more than some people can help being easily moved and dissuaded from their own inclinations; only he could not help listening to the accounts that now reached him of the catastrophe at Paris, and feeling that any faint persistent hope was now crushed for ever.

Lady Henley's wishes were apt to colour her impression of events as they happened. According to her version, it was for Jonah's sake that Dolly had broken with Robert. It was to Jonah that Dolly had confided her real reason for parting from her cousin. 'You know it yourself, Squire. It was painful, but far better than the alternative.'—'Miss Vanborough's confidences did not extend so far as you imagine, my dear lady,' said Mr. Anley: 'I must honestly confess that I heard nothing of the sort.'

Lady Henley was peremptory. She was not at liberty to show her son's last letter, but she had *full* authority for her information. She was not in the habit of speaking at random. Time would show. Lady Henley looked obstinate. The Squire seemed annoyed. Frank Raban said nothing; he walked away gloomily; he came less and less to the Court; he looked very cross at times, although the work he had taken in hand was prospering. Whitewashed cottages were multiplying, a cricket-field had been laid out for the use of the village, Medmere was drained and sown with turnip-seed. Frank was now supposed to be an experienced agriculturist. He looked in the *Farmer's Friend* regularly. Tanner used to consult him upon a variety of subjects. What was to be done about the sheep? Pitch plaster was no good, should they try Spanish ointment? Those hurdles must be seen to, and what about the flues and the grinders down at the mill?

Notwithstanding these all-absorbing interests, Frank no sooner received Morgan's letter, with its surprising news, than he started off at once to concert measures with the Rector.

'Joe' was supposed to be at Liverpool, and Frank started for Liverpool and spent a fruitless week looking up all the discharged and invalided soldiers for ten miles round. He thought he had found some trace of the man he was in search of, but it was tiresome work, even in Dorothea's interest. John Morgan wrote that Jonah was in London, kind and helpful. Foolish Frank, who should have known better by this time, said to himself that they could have settled their business very well without Jonah's help. Frank did him justice, and wished him back in Yorkshire. May he be forgiven. Diffidence and jealousy are human failings, that bring many a trouble in their train. True love should be far beyond such pitiful preoccupations: and yet, if ever any man loved any woman honestly and faithfully, Frank Raban loved Dorothea: although his fidelity may have shown want of spirit, and his jealousy want of common sense. Dolly had vaguely hoped that Raban might have written to her, but the jealous thought that she might show Jonah his letter had prevented him from writing. John Marplot wrote that Jonah was often in S—— Street. Why did not the good Rector add that it was Mrs. Fane who asked him to come there? Dolly was rather provoked when Jonah reappeared time after time; one day he offered himself to join them in a little expedition that Mrs. Fane had planned. Mrs. Fane was pleased to welcome the Captain and the Rector too. Six hours of country were to set John Morgan up for his Sunday services. Dolly looked pale, some fresh air would do her good, said her friend. 'Do I want to be done good to?' said Dolly, smiling.

Dolly was standing out on the balcony, carefully holding her black silk dress away from the dusty iron bars. It was a bright gentle-winded Sunday morning, and the countless bells of the district were jangling together, and in different notes calling their votaries to different shrines. The high

bell striking quick and clear, the low bell with melancholy cadence, the old-fashioned parish bell swinging on in a sing-song way: a little Catholic chapel had begun its chime an hour before. From the house doors came Sunday folks—children trotting along, with their best hats and conscious little legs, mammas radiant, maid-servants running, cabs going off laden. All this cheerful jingle-jangling filled Dolly's heart with a happy sadness. It was so long since she had heard it, and it was all so dear and so familiar, as she stood listening to it all, that it was a little service in her heart of grateful love and thanks—for love and for praise; for life to utter her love for the peace which had come to her after her many troubles. She was not more happy outwardly in circumstance, but how much more happy in herself none but she herself could tell. How it had come about she could scarcely have explained; but so it was. She had ceased to struggle; the wild storm in her heart had hushed away; she was now content with the fate, which had seemed to her so terrible in the days of her girlhood. Unloved, misunderstood, was this her fate? she had in some fashion risen above it—and she felt that the same peace and strength were hers. Peace, she knew not why; strength coming, she scarcely knew how or whence. It was no small thing to be one voice in the great chorus of voices, to be one aspiration in the great breath of life, and to know that her own wishes and her own happiness were not the sum of all her wants.

CHAPTER LV.

SEE YOU NOT SOMETHING BESIDE MASONRY?

> Entering then,
> Right o'er a mount of newly-fallen stones,
> The dusky-raftered many-cobwebbed Hall,
> He found an ancient dame in dun brocade,
> And near her, like a blossom vermeil-white,
> That lightly breaks a faded flower-sheath,
> Moved the fair Enid . . .
>
> —IDYLLS OF THE KING.

ON the Friday before they were to start on their little expedition, Mrs. Fane was busy; Dolly had been sitting alone for some time.

She suddenly called to old Marker, asked her to put on her bonnet and come out with her. Dolly made Marker stop a cab, and they drove off; the old nurse wanted to turn back when she found out where Dolly was going, but she could not resist the girl's pleading looks. 'It will do me good, Marker,' said Dolly, 'indeed it will. I want to see the dear old place again.'

All that morning she felt a longing to see the old place once more: something seemed to tell her that she must go. One often thinks that to be in such a place would bring ease, that the sight of such a person would solve all difficulties, and one travels off, and one seeks out the friend, and it was but a fancy after all. Poor old Church House! All

night long Dolly had been dreaming of her home, unwinding the skeins of the past one by one. It may have been a fancy that brought Dolly, but it was a curious chance.

They had come to the top of the lane, and Dolly got out and paid her cab. Her eyes were dim with the past, that was coming as a veil or a shroud between her and the present. She had no faint suspicion of what was at hand. They walked on unsuspiciously to the ivy gate: suddenly Marker cried out, and then Dolly too gave a little gasp. What cruel blow had fallen? what desecrating hand had dared to touch the dear old haunt? What was this? She had not dreamt *this*. The garden wall, so sweet with jessamine, was lying low, the prostrate ivy was struggling over a heap of bricks and rubbish, tracks of wheel-barrows ran from the house to the cruel heap, the lawn was tossed up, a mound of bricks stood raised by the drawing-room windows; the windows were gone, black hollows stood in their places, a great gap ran down from Dolly's old bed-room up above to the oak room on the terrace, part of the dining-room was gone: pathetic, black, charred, dismantled, the old house stood stricken and falling from its foundation. Dolly's heart beat furiously as she caught Marker's arm.

'What has happened?' she said; 'it is not fire—it is—oh, Marker, this is too much.'

Poor Marker could not say one word; the two women stood clinging to each other in the middle of the garden walk. The sky was golden, the shadows were purple among the fallen bricks.

'This is too much,' Dolly repeated a little wildly, and then she broke away from Marker, crying out, 'Don't come, don't come.'

The workmen were gone: for some reason the place was deserted and there was no one to hear Dolly's sobs as she impatiently fled across the lawn. Was it foolish that these

poor old bricks should be so dear to her, foolish that their fall should seem to her something more than a symbol of all that had fallen and passed away? Ah no, no. While the old house stood she had not felt quite parted, but now the very place of her life would be no more; all the grief of that year seemed brought back to her when she stopped short suddenly and stood looking round and about in a scared sort of way. She was looking for something that was not any more, listening for silent voices. Dolly! cried the voices, and the girl's whole heart answered as she stood stretching out her arms towards the ulterior shores. At that minute she would have been very glad to lie down on the old stone terrace and never rise again. Time was so long, it weighed and weighed, and seemed to be crushing her. She had tried to be brave, but her cup was full, and she felt as if she could bear no more, not one heavy hour more. This great weight on her heart seemed to have been gathering from a long way off, to have been lasting for years and years; no tears came to ease this pain. Marker had sat down on the stone ledge and was wiping her grief in her handkerchief. Dolly was at her old haunt by the pond, and bending over and looking into the depth with strange circling eyes.

This heavy weight seemed to be weighing her down and drawing her to the very brink of the old pond. She longed to be at rest, to go one step beyond the present, to be lying straight in the murky grey water, resting and at peace. Who wanted her any more? No one now. Those who had loved her best were dead; Robert had left her: every one had left her. The people outside in the lane may have seen her through the gap in the wall, a dark figure stooping among the purple shadows; she heard their voices calling, but she did not heed them; they were only living voices: then she heard a step upon the gravel close at hand, and she started

back, for, looking up, she saw it was Frank Raban, who came forward. Dolly was not surprised to see him. Everything to-day was so strange, so unnatural, that this sudden meeting seemed but a part of all the rest. She threw up her hands and sank down upon the old bench.

His steady eyes were fixed upon her. 'What are you doing here?' he said, frightened by the look in her face, and forgetting in his agitation to greet her formally.

'What does it all matter?' said Dolly, answering his reproachful glance, and speaking in a shrill voice: 'I don't care about anything any more, I am tired out, yes, very tired,' the girl repeated. She was wrought up and speaking to herself as much as to him, crying out, not to be heard, but because this heavy weight was upon her, and she was struggling to be rid of it, and reckless—she must speak to him, to anybody, to the shivering bushes, to the summer dust and silence, as she had spoken to the stagnant water of the pond. She was in a state which is not a common one, in which pain plays the part of great joy, and excitement unloosens the tongue, forces men and women into momentary sincerity and directness carries all before it; her long self-control had broken down, she was at the end of her powers—she was only thinking of her own grief and not of him just then. As she turned her pale stone-cut face away and looked across the low laurel bushes, Frank Raban felt a pang of pity for her of which Dorothea had no conception. He came up to the bench.

'Don't lose courage,' he said—'not yet; you have been so good all this time.'

It was not so much what he said which touched her, as the way in which he said it. He seemed to know how terribly she had been suffering, to be in tune even with this remorseless fugue of pain repeated. His kindness suddenly overcame her, and touched her; she hid her face in her

hands and burst out crying, and the tears eased and softened her strained nerves.

'It was coming here that brought it all back,' she said; 'and finding ——' Her voice failed.

'I am very sorry,' he said. 'How can I forgive myself? It is all my ——' He turned quite pale, stopped abruptly, and walked away for a few steps. When he came back he spoke almost in his usual voice, and then and there began to tell Dolly all that had happened, of the curious discovery which Mrs. Fane had made, of Smith's confession, and of all that it involved, that she was now the one person interested in the property, that Rhoda Parnell had no single right to Lady Sarah's inheritance. He told her very carefully, sparing her in every way, thinking of the words which would be simplest and least likely to give pain.

'We ought to have told you before,' he repeated. 'We meant to spare you until all the facts were clearly ascertained. We have made a fatal mistake, and now I am only adding to your pain.'

But the tears with which Dolly listened to him were not bitter, his voice was so kind, his words so manly and simple. He did not shirk the truth as some people sometimes do when they speak of sorrow, but he faced the worst with the simplicity and directness of a man who had seen it all very near. 'Please don't blame yourself,' she said.

If there are certain states of mind in which facts seem exaggerated, and every feeling is over-wrought, it is at these very times that people are most ready to accept the blessings of consolation. 'Peace, be still,' said the Divine Voice, speaking to the tossing waves. And voices come, speaking in human tones to many a poor tempest-tossed soul. It may be only a friend who speaks, only a lover perhaps, or a brother or sister's voice. Love, friendship, brotherhood give a meaning to the words. Only that day Dolly had

thought that all was over, and already the miracle was working, the storm was passing from her heart.

It all seemed as a dream in the night, when she thought it over afterwards. She had not seen Frank again, but to have seen him once more made all the difference to her.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE PLAY IS PLAYED, THE CURTAIN DROPS.

In the battle of life are we all going to try for the honours of championship? If we can do our duty, if we can keep our place pretty honourably through the combat, let us say 'Laus Deo' at the end of it, as the firing ceases and the night falls over the field.—ROUNDABOUT PAPERS.

COLONEL FANE was not a rich man, but he had a house which had been his father's before him, and to which he returned now and again in the intervals of service. It stood at a bend of the river, and among hollows and ivy. He looked forward to ending his work there some day, and resting for a year or two. In the meanwhile the old house was often let in summer, and Mrs. Fane looked after the repairs and necessary renovations. She sometimes spent a few hours among the sedges and shady chestnut-trees. She loved the old place—as who does not love it who has ever been there?—and discovered this sleeping bower, where one may dream of chivalry, of fairy land, or of peace on earth, or that one is sunshine, or a river washing between heavy banks; or turn one's back to the stream and see a pasture-country sliding away towards the hills, through shade and fragrant hours, with songs from the hedges and mellow echoes from the distant farms.

The little party came down, not unprepared to be happy. Mrs. Fane, who never wasted an opportunity, had also brought a little girl from her orphanage, who was to remain

for a time with the housekeeper at Queensmede—that was the name of the old house. The child was a bright little creature, with merry soft eyes flashing in wild excitement, and the kind lady was somewhat divided between her interest in some news that John Morgan was giving her and her anxiety lest little Charlotte, her god-daughter, should jump out of window.

'We have to thank the Captain here,' said John Morgan, 'for finding the man we were in search of; his evidence fully bears out poor Smith's dying declaration. I have sent to Tapeall,' said John, shaking his head. 'I find that, after all my precautions, Rhoda got a hint from him last week. However, it is all right—thanks to the Captain—as right as anything so unfortunately managed can ever be.'

'I don't deserve any thanks,' said Jonah. 'Poor Carter found me out. He wanted to borrow 10*s*.'

'When did all this happen?' said Mrs. Fane.

'Only yesterday,' answered the Rector. 'I telegraphed to Raban—poor fellow, he had gone off to Shoeburyness on some false scent; I left word at home in case he should call.'

Dolly stooped down and held up little Charlotte to see the pretty golden fields fly past, and the sheep and the lambs frisking.

'Are they gold flowers?' said the little girl. 'Is that where ladies gets their money? Is you going to be very rich?'

Dolly did not answer. The strange news had overcome her; she had scarcely heard what they all were saying, so many other voices were speaking to her, as she watched the flying fields. Was it all to be hers? The old house was gone—and this was what she most dwelt upon—money was but little in comparison to the desolate home. Could she ever forgive Rhoda this cruel blow? Ah! she might have had it all, if she had but

spared the dear home. A letter had come from Robert only that morning, and all this time Dolly was carrying it unopened in her pocket, failing courage to break the seal and open up the past.

Shadows and foreboding clouds were far away from that tranquil valley, from the shady chestnut-tree beneath which Dolly is sitting, resting and shading her eyes from the light.

When the banquet is over they get up from their feast and stroll down to the river side, through the silent village into the overgrown meadow, where green waving things are throwing their shadows, where an old half-ruined nunnery stands fronting the sun and the silver river beyond the fields.

There were nuns at Queensmede once: one might fancy a Guinevere ending her sad life there in tranquil penitence; a knight on his knees by the river; a horse browsing in the meadow. The old building still stands among wild-flowers and hay, within sight of the river bend; the deserted garden is unfenced, and the roses, straggling in the field, mingle their petals with the clover and poppies that spring luxuriantly. The stable is a gabled building with slender lancet windows, with open doors swinging on the latch. The nuns have passed out one by one from the Lady House, so they call it still. Dolly peeped in at the dismantled walls and pictured their former occupants to herself—women singing and praying with pale sweet faces radiant in the sweet tranquillity of the old place, and yet their life seemed thin and sad somehow. It was here that she found courage at last to read Robert's letter as she stood in the doorway. She pulled it out and broke the seal:—

My Dear Dorothea,—

Notwithstanding all that has happened, I still feel that it is no common tie of friendship and interest which must always bind us together, and that it is due to you that I myself should inform you of a determination which

will, as I trust, eventually contribute to everybody's happiness. After what you said to me it will, I know, be no surprise to you to have heard that I have proposed to Rhoda, and been accepted by her; but I am anxious to spare your learning from anybody but myself the fact, that we have determined to put on our marriage, and that this letter will reach you on our wedding day.

Your friend Rhoda has entirely thrown herself upon my guidance, and under the circumstances it has seemed advisable to me to urge no longer delay. My affairs require my presence in England; hers also need the most careful management. I am not satisfied with the manner in which certain investments have been disposed of—notwithstanding some—perhaps not unnatural reluctance on her part. I propose returning to Church House immediately after our wedding, where, let me tell you, my dear Dora, you will ever find a hearty welcome, and a home if need be, although I am anxious to forget the past, particularly under my present circumstances. I cannot but recall once more to you how differently events might have turned out. I have never had an opportunity of explaining that to you, but I hope you do me the justice to believe that it was not your change of fortune which affected my decision to abide by your determination. I have been most anxious to assure you of this. It was your want of trust which first made me feel how dissimilar we were in many ways, how little chance there was in my being able to influence you as a husband. Forgive me for saying that you did not understand my motives, nor do entire justice to the feelings which made me endeavour to persuade you for your own advantage as well as mine. If you had come to India when I wished it much anxiety to yourself and much sorrow would have been spared you. Now it is too late to think of what might or might not have been, only this fact remains, and do not forget it, dear Dora, that you will never have a more sincere friend nor one more ready to advise and assist you in any difficulty than

Your affectionate cousin,

R. Henley.

Rhoda (did she know I was writing) would unite in most affectionate love. I find her society more and more congenial and delightful to me.

'What are you reading, Dolly?' said Jonah, coming up. 'I ought to know that confounded blue paper. Has that fellow the impudence to write to you?' Then he asked more shyly, 'May I see the letter?'

'No, dear Jonah,' Dolly said, folding it up. 'It is a kind letter, written kindly.'

Then she looked hard at him and blushed a little. 'This is his wedding day,' she said; 'that is why he wrote to me.'

Dolly would not show her letter to any one, except to Mrs. Fane. She felt that it would be commented on; she was grateful to Robert for writing it; and yet the letter made her ashamed now that she began to see him not as he was, but to judge from another standard, and to look at him with other people's eyes. In after days she scarcely ever spoke of him even to her nearest and dearest. To-day she merely repeated the news. No one made any comment in her hearing. They were anxious at first, but Dolly's face was serene, and they could see that she was not unhappy.

One thing Mrs. Fane could understand. Robert evidently knew nothing of the destruction of Church House.

'I am glad Robert had nothing to do with it,' said Dolly, with a sigh.

'Will you come wiss me,' said little Charlotte, running up and taking Dolly's hand. Miss Vanborough was not sorry to leave the discussion of Robert's prospects to others, and she walked away, with the little girl still holding by her hand, and went and stood for a minute on the bridge, looking down at the river and the barge floating by; it slid under her feet with its cargo of felled wood, and its wild and silent human cargo, and then it went floating away between the summer banks.

The waters deepened and wavered. Tall waving grasses were also floating and dragging upon the banks, crimson poppies starting here and there, golden iris hanging their heads by the river. Little Charlotte presently ran away, and, half sunk in the grasses, stood struggling with a daisy. A sunshiny man came leading a horse from the sleepy old barn that stood beyond the Lady House. Its old bricks were hung with green veils, and with purple and golden nets of lichen and of moss.

Dolly stopped—was it a burst of music? It was a sweet overpowering rush of honeysuckle scent coming from the

deserted garden. In this pastoral landscape there was no sound louder than the lap of the water, or the flowing gurgle of the pigeons straggling from one to another moss-grown ledge. Chance lights stole from the sedge to the grassy banks, from the creek by sweet tumbled grasses to the deserted old grange. Round about stood the rose-trees, flowering in the wilderness, dropping their blossoms; the swallows were flying about the eaves; the daisies sparkled where they caught the sunlight.

While Dolly and little Charlotte were gathering their flowers Frank Raban, who came walking along the fields by the river, had joined the others by the Lady House. Morgan's telegram had summoned him back to London, and his message had brought him on to Queensmede.

'Where is Miss Vanborough?' he asked presently.

'Don't you see her on the bridge?' said Jonah, pointing.

Frank walked on a few steps. He saw her standing on the bridge, high above the torrent. Then he saw her come slowly along, followed by her little companion. . . .

They were walking slowly away from the field and the deserted garden. As they all straggled slowly homewards with shadows at their feet, the old ivy buttresses of the walls were beginning to shine with vesper light, with deeper and crisper lines in the pure illumination all around. Dolly thought of Haydn's andante again, only here it was light that brought music out of all these instruments; silences, perfumes, and heavy creepers from the bewildering, sweet old place, overflown with birds, heaped up and falling into hollows.

Frank walked silently beside Dolly. He had come prepared to sympathise, full of concern for her, and she did not seem to want his help or to care for it any more. That day by the pond, when she had first turned to him in her grief, he had felt nearer to her than now, when in her

reserve she said no word of all that he knew she must be feeling. Could this be pride? Did she show this indifferent face to the world, was she determined that no one should guess at the secret strain? Was she treating him as the first come acquaintance? It was very proper, no doubt, and very dignified, but he was disappointed. He could not understand it. She must be unhappy, and yet as he looked at her face he saw no effort there—only peace shining from it. She had stopped before a garland of briony that was drooping with beautiful leaves, making a garland of shadows upon the bricks. She pointed it out to him.

'It is very pretty,' said Raban, 'but I am in no appreciative mood;' and he looked back at Jonah, who came up just then, and began admiring. Why was Jonah always with her? Why did he seem to join into all their talk? Frank was jealous of Jonah, but he was still more jealous of Dorothea's confidence. There seemed to be no end to Dolly's cousins. Here was Jonah, to whom she had already given more of her confidence than to him; Jonah, who had served her effectually, while he, Frank, had done nothing; worse than nothing; Dolly, who was walking along, still looking at the bunches of briony she had gathered. It was not a very heroic mood, and I am truly ashamed of my hero's passing ill humour, coming as it did at this inopportune moment to trouble Miss Vanborough's tardy happiness. And yet somehow it did not trouble her; she saw that Frank was silent and gloomy, but with her instinct for idealising those she loved, she supposed there was some good reason for it, and she felt that she might perhaps even try to find out what was amiss; it was no longer wrong to take an interest in all that affected him—even Dolly's conscience allowed this—and, when the others walked on, in her sweet voice she asked 'if anything was wrong,' and as she spoke her grey eyes opened kindly. Dolly loved to take care of the people

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[illegible] beside Dolly. He had come [illegible] for her, and she [illegible] for it any more [illegible] to him [illegible] in her

neath that fixed dreamy gaze. It seemed to look through her heart. Could he read all that she was thinking? Ah! he might read her heart, for she was only thinking as she stood there of all her friend's long fidelity and steady friendship. What had she ever done to deserve it all? And her heart seemed to answer her thought with a strange silent rapture. Now she might own to herself the blessing of his unfailing friendship; it was no longer a wrong to any human being. Even if she were never anything more to him, she might openly and gratefully accept his help and his interest; acknowledge the blessing, the new life it had brought her. She had struggled so long to keep the feeling hidden away, it was an unspeakable relief to have nothing more to conceal from herself nor from others—nothing more. She knew at last that she loved him, and she was not ashamed. What a journey she had travelled since they had stood by the spring that autumn day, not a year ago; what terrible countries she had visited, and had it come to this once more? Might she love now in happiness as well as in sorrow? Was she not happy standing in this golden hollow, with the person whom she loved best in all the world? No other human being was in sight, nothing but the old shady village, floating into overflowing green, the sleepy haycocks, the empty barn, the heaping ivy on the wall, the sunlight slanting upon the silence. She did not mean to speak, but Frank, in this utter silence, heard her secret thought at last. 'Don't you know?' said Dorothea. 'Oh! Frank, don't you know?' Did she speak the words or look them? He could scarcely tell, only with unutterable tenderness and rapture in his heart he knew that she was his, that life is kind, that true hearts do come together, that one moment of such happiness and completeness lights up a whole night's wild chaos, and reveals the sweetness of a dawning world.

Jonah, who had gone on with Mrs. Fane, came to the door to call them again, but they did not see him, and he went back into the house, where Mrs. Fane and John Morgan were hard at work upon an inventory.

'Here, let me help you,' said Jonah; 'I'm not too clumsy to count teacups.' Little Charlotte made herself very useful by carrying a plate from one chair to another. She finally let it drop, and would have cried when it broke, if the good-natured young captain had not immediately given her the ink to hold. This mark of confidence filled her with pride, and dried her tears. 'Sall I 'old it up very high?' she said. 'Can you draw a ziant? I can, wiss your pen.'

It took them nearly an hour to get through their task, and by this time the tea was ready in the library, the old-fashioned urn hissing and steaming, and Jonah and John Morgan were preparing to set out on their journey home. Frank went with them, and then when he was gone Dolly told her friend her story, and the two sat talking until late into the starlight.

Two days afterwards an announcement appeared in *The Times*, and the world learnt that Robert Henley and Miss Rhoda Parnell had been married at the British Embassy at Paris by special licence by the Bishop of Oronoco. The next news was that of Dolly's marriage to Frank Raban. Pebblesthwaite was very much excited. Lady Henley's indignation was boundless at first, but was happily diverted by the news of her favourite daughter Norah's engagement to Mr. Jack Redmayne.

James Brand's blue eyes twinkled a kindly sympathy, when the letter came announcing Frank's happiness. He came up to be present at the wedding. It was in the little city church with its smoke-stained windows. John Morgan's voice failed as he read the opening words and looked down at the bent heads of the two who had met at last hand-

in-hand. 'In perfect love and peace,' he said; and, as he said it, he felt that the words were no vain prayers.

He had no fear for them, nor had they fear for each other. Some one standing in the drizzle of the street outside saw them drive off with calm and happy faces. It was Robert Henley, who was passing through London with his wife. Philippa, who saw him, kissed her hand and would have stopped him, but he walked on without looking back. He had been to Mr. Tapeall's that morning, after a painful explanation with Rhoda—Rhoda, who was moodily sitting at the window of her room in the noisy hotel, and going over the wretched details of that morning's talk. It was true that she had sold Church House, tempted by the builder's liberal offer, and wanting money to clear the many extravagances of her Paris life; it was true that she had concealed the lawyer's letter from Robert in which she learnt that her title to the property was about to be disputed. She had hurried on their wedding, she had won the prize for which her foolish soul had longed; it was not love so much as the pride of life and of gratified vanity. These things had dazzled her, for these things this foolish little creature had sacrificed her all. Dolly might have been happy in time, even married to Robert, but for Rhoda what chance was there? Would her French kid gloves put out their primrose fingers to help her in her lonely hours? would her smart bonnets crown her home with peace and the content of a loving spirit? She lived long enough to find out something of the truth, and to come to Dolly one day to help her in her sorest need. This was long after, when Dolly had long been living at Ravensrick, when her children were playing round about her, and the sunshine of her later life had warmed and brightened the sadness of her youth. What more shall I say of my heroine? That sweet and generous soul, ripening by degrees, slow and credulous, not embittered by the petty

pains of life, faithful and tender and vibrating to many tones, is no uncommon type. Her name is one that I gave her long ago, but her real names are many, and are those of the friends whom we love.

Church House was never rebuilt. At Dolly's wish a row of model lodgings, with iron balconies, patent boilers, ventilators, and clothes hanging out to dry on every floor, have been erected on the site of the place where Lady Sarah lived, and so the kind woman's dreams and helpful schemes have come true.

'We could not put back the old house,' said Dolly, 'and we thought this would be the next best thing to do.' The rooms are let at a somewhat cheaper rate than the crowded lodging-houses round about. People, as a rule, dislike the periodical whitewashing, and are fond of stuffing up the ventilators, but otherwise they are very well satisfied.

Dolly did not receive many wedding presents. Some time after her marriage, Rhoda sent Dolly a diamond cross; it was that one that Frank Raban had given her many years before. She was abroad at the time, and for many years neither Rhoda nor Dolly met again. Mrs. Palmer used to write home accounts of Rhoda's beauty and fashion from Ems, and other watering-places where she used to spend her summers.

The Admiral, who was still abroad, made it an especial point, so Philippa declared, that she should spend her summers on the Continent.

One day Mrs. Raban was turning out some papers in a drawer in her husband's writing-table, when she came upon a packet that she thought must belong to herself. They were written in a familiar writing that she knew at once, for it was Henley's. They were not addressed, and Dolly could not at first imagine how these letters had come there, nor when she had received them. As she looked she was still more bewildered. They were letters not unlike some that

she had received, and yet they had entirely passed from her mind; presently turning over a page she read, not her own name on the address, but that of Emma Penfold, and a sentence—'It is best for your welfare that we should not meet again,' wrote Henley. 'I am not a marrying man myself: circumstances render it impossible. May you be as happy in your new life. You will have an excellent husband, and one who . . . .'

'What have you got there?' said Frank, who had come in.

'Oh, Frank, don't ask me,' said Dolly, hastily going to the fire that was burning in the grate and flinging the packet into the flames; then she ran up to him, and clung hold of his arm for a minute. She could not speak.

Frank looked at the burning packet—at the open drawers—and then he understood it all. 'I thought I had burnt those letters long ago,' he said; and stooping he took his wife's hand in his and kissed it.

* * * * *

As I write the snow lies thick upon the ground outside, upon the branches of the trees, upon the lawns. Here, within, the fire leaps brightly in its iron cage; the children cluster round the chair by the chimney corner, where the mother sits reading their beloved fairy tales. The hearth was empty once—the home was desolate; but time after time, day by day, we see the phœnix of home and of love springing from the dead ashes; hopes are fulfilled that seemed too sweet to dream of; love kindles and warms chilled hearts to life. Take courage, say the happy to those in sorrow and trouble; are there not many mansions even here? seasons in their course; harvests in their season, thanks be to the merciful ordinance that metes out sorrow and peace, and longing and fulfilment, and rest after the storm.

Take courage, say the happy—the message of the sorrowful is harder to understand. The echoes come from afar, and reach beyond our ken. As the cry passes beyond us into the awful unknown, we feel that this is, perhaps, the voice in life that reaches beyond life itself. Not of harvests to come, not of peaceful home hearths do they speak in their sorrow. Their fires are out, their hearths are in ashes, but see, it was the sunlight that extinguished the flame.

THE END.

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